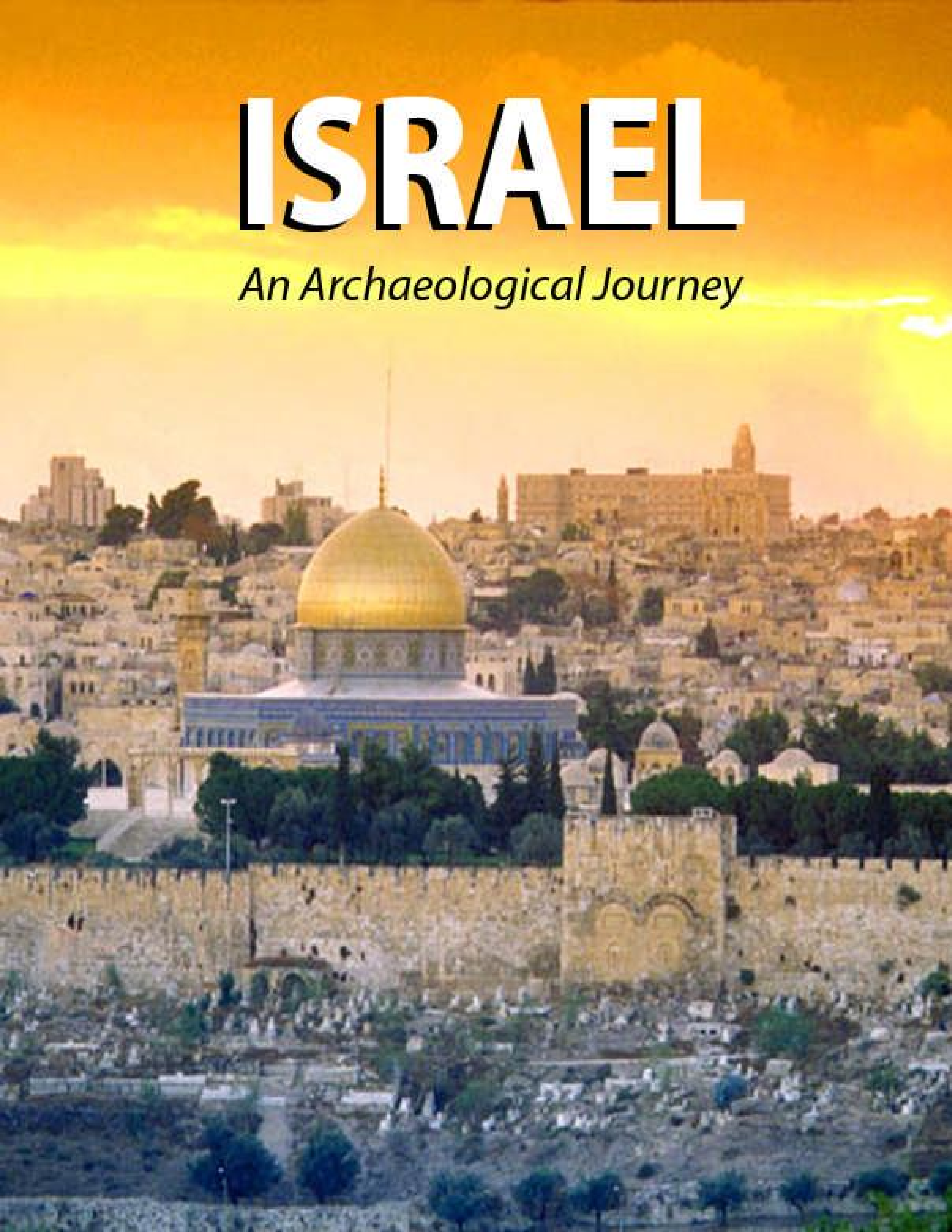
ISRAEL

An Archaeological Journey



Israel

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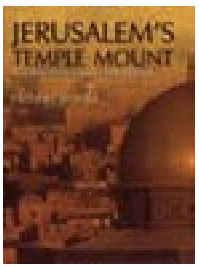
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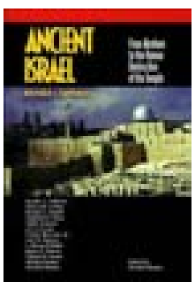


Jerusalem's Temple Mount

by Hershel Shanks

Few places in the world have enjoyed such religious significance as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. For the "armchair archaeologist," this is as close as you can get to this site without a shovel.

More information on Jerusalem's Temple Mount

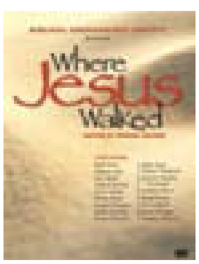


Ancient Israel

Edited by Hershel Shanks

This volume takes the reader through the Bible as history, analyzing the Biblical text and testing individual Biblical passages against the evidence of extra-Biblical sources and archaeological finds.

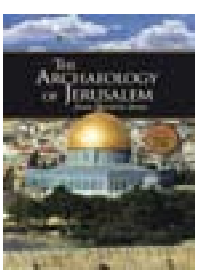
More information on Ancient Israel



Where Jesus Walked DVD

Hear from the excavators who are bringing the Gospels to life with startling discoveries. See the compelling evidence at Nazareth, Galilee, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Qumran, Sepphoris and Jerusalem.

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The Archaeology of Jerusalem DVD

Discover the great archaeological finds from Jerusalem over the ages. On-location shots include Herod's Temple Mount, the Jerusalem Cardo, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Dome of the Rock.

More information on The Archaeology of Jerusalem

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Introduction

Israel. The very name means different things to different people. It is a geographic place: the ancient land of the Hebrews as well as a small, modern nation on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. It is a people: practitioners of Judaism who see themselves as descended from Biblical Jacob. It is a hot-button political topic, a homeland, a vacation destination and, perhaps most significantly, it is the place where three of the world's major religions converge, creating a palimpsest of history that is one of the richest and most complex in the world. The following compilation of articles represents an effort to sift through some of the archaeology and history of this ancient land, offering a glimpse of these Biblically significant sites through an archaeologist's lens.

In "The Fury of Babylon: Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction," Harvard professor Lawrence Stager guides readers through the excavations at Ashkelon, painting a portrait of the city whose vicious destruction by the Babylonian army was so vividly described by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 47:4–5). Ashkelon was a casualty in the greater conflict between the Babylonian empire in the east and Egypt in the west. Stager sets the site against the backdrop of the larger political and historical context of the region in the seventh century B.C., and offers a detailed picture of the city and the life of its inhabitants on the eve of its destruction, as gleaned from a meticulous examination of the archaeological record.

Approximately 600 years after Ashkelon fell to Nebuchadnezzar II's armies, another major civilization was approaching the zenith of its power. The reach of the Roman Empire was stretching out across the Mediterranean region. With the invasion of Pompey's troops in 63 B.C., Judea came under Roman control, and in 6 A.D. it was officially annexed as the Roman province of Palestine. The seaside port of Caesarea was designated the official residence of the Roman prefect; it would remain the political and economic capital of the country until the Arab conquest of the region more than 600 years later. Israel Antiquities Authority archaeologist Yosef Porath explores this most Roman of cities in his article "Vegas on the Med: A Tour of Caesarea's Entertainment District." As the director of several excavations at Caesarea, Dr. Porath is uniquely positioned to offer insight into the political and cultural life of the city, and he does so by using results of decades of archaeological research.

Although Judea was already a Roman province when Jesus lived, there has long been debate about the cultural influences that may have shaped his life and teachings. In their article "How Jewish was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?" scholars Mark Chancey and Eric Meyers examine the Galilean city of Sepphoris as it was in the early first century A.D. Since the city is just 4 miles from Nazareth and has yielded more archaeological data than the nearby village, scholars have traditionally viewed Sepphoris as a cultural barometer of life where Jesus grew up. How Jewish *was* Sepphoris? Chancey and Meyers argue that, despite the influence of the omniscient

Romans, a strong Jewish cultural identity existed in the community during Jesus' formative years. Through a careful examination of the archaeological record at Sepphoris, Chancey and Meyers make a case for the Jewish culture that they maintain was the backdrop of Jesus' life.

That fact that the people of Judea strove to maintain their identity despite the presence of the occupying Romans has never been disputed. Indeed, there is perhaps no stronger symbol of this struggle for Jewish identity and independence then Masada, the palace-fortress built by Herod the Great that was the site of the last, desperate stand of a group of Jewish Zealots against the Roman army during the First Jewish Revolt. The traditional interpretation of events at Masada is that this struggle ended in the dramatic suicide of the almost 1,000 Zealots in 73 A.D. The fact that these last vestiges of the Jewish revolt against Rome chose death over capture has become an indelible cultural memory, and both archaeologists and historians have long studied the site and the existing primary source for more clues regarding the rebels' last hours. In his article "Where Masada's Defenders Fell," sociologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda takes a close look at the traditional interpretations of the first-century accounts of Flavius Josephus, the primary source that historians have relied on in reconstructing the events at Masada. In a re-examination of the text, Ben-Yehuda offers a different theory regarding the final resting place of Masada's defenders.

The writings of Flavius Josephus are not just relied upon for interpreting events at Masada. Indeed, his works are frequently used as the launching point for many archaeological investigations in the region. Archaeologist Ehud Netzer relies in part on Josephus to reconstruct Herod's Antonia fortress. In "A New Reconstruction of Paul's Prison: Herod's Antonia Fortress," Netzer puts forth his archaeological interpretation of the structure that guarded the Temple Mount and may have been where Paul was imprisoned by the Roman authorities.

Through the archaeological study of Israel's history, we are gradually gaining a more vivid picture of the ancient cultures and events that have shaped modern society. The study of the past, however, particularly in such a historically dynamic part of the world, is always a fluid process. No doubt future generations of archaeologists and scholars will continue to add to and alter the ever-changing landscape of Israel's history. In the meantime, it remains a place that will draw visitors of all ages and faiths to experience this most sacred of destinations—in all of its incarnations.

Sarah K. Yeomans
Washington D.C.
September, 20

The Fury of Babylon

Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction

By Lawrence E. Stager

In 586 B.C.E. Nebuchadrezzar (also known as Nebuchadnezzar II), king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and burned the city. This of course is the focal point of the Biblical story. For Nebuchadrezzar, however, Jerusalem was only one of many prizes, part of a major military operation in the West extending over many years. The real battle was between two superpowers—the newly ascendant Babylonian Empire in the East (replacing the Assyrians) and Egypt in the West. Hebrew University professor Avraham Malamat has aptly applied the term "bipolar politics" to this contest.[1]

By the last half of the seventh century B.C.E., Egypt dominated neighboring countries like Philistia and Judah (the northern kingdom of Israel having already been destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E.).

During the reigns of Pharaoh Psamtik I (664–610 B.C.E.) and his son Necho II (610–595 B.C.E.), Egypt moved into the vacuum left by the withdrawal of Assyria from the West. For four decades Egypt held sway over former Assyrian provinces as far north as Megiddo (Magiddu).[2] Referring to this mortal engagement between East and West, between Babylonia and Egypt, the prophet Jeremiah rebuked Judah in the harshest terms for allying itself with Egypt. Philistia made the same mistake.

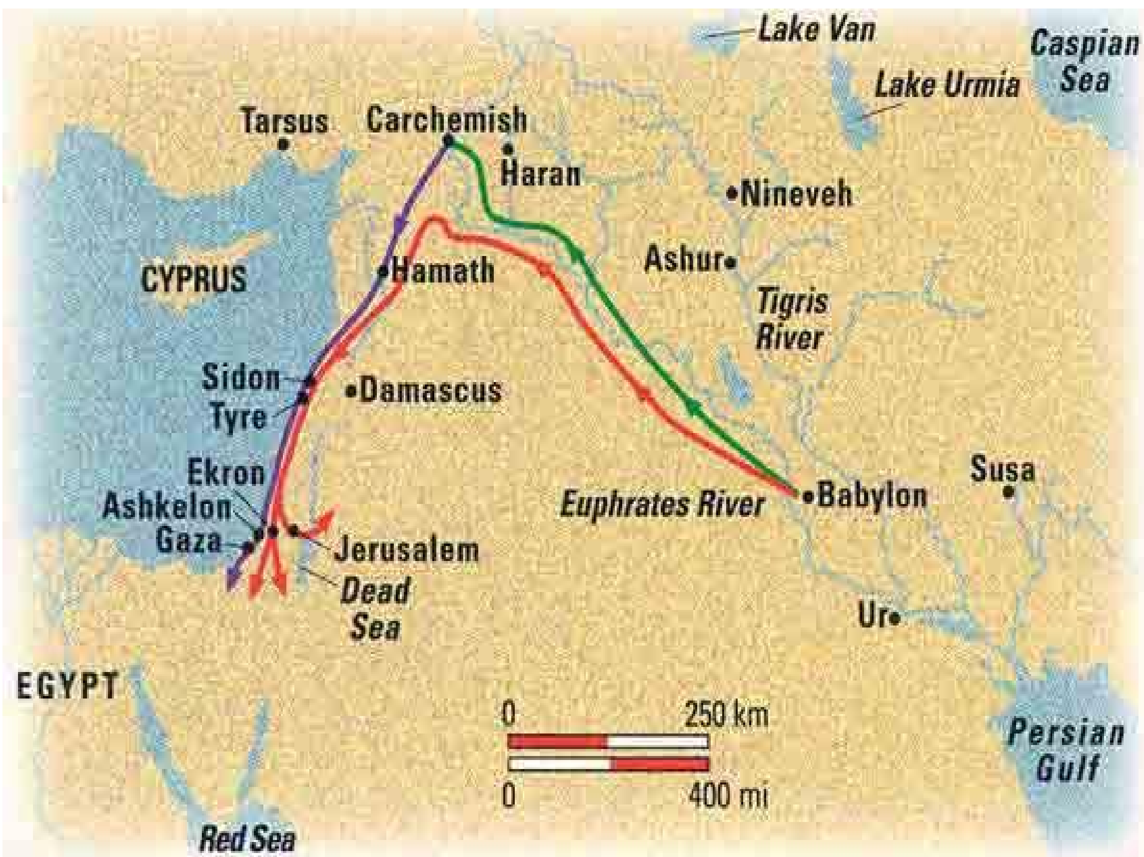
In 605 B.C.E., as crown prince and field commander, Nebuchadrezzar led Babylonian troops in a critical battle with the Egyptians under Pharaoh Necho II at Carchemish on the Euphrates River, in what is today western Syria. A decisive Babylonian victory emboldened Nebuchadrezzar, now king, to move south. (It was to this Babylonian victory that the prophet Jeremiah referred when he predicted that Judah too would be devastated by Nebuchadrezzar [Jeremiah 25:8–11]; the stamp of the battle of Carchemish is also seen in explicit references in Jeremiah 46:2–6.)

After Carchemish, the new king campaigned throughout most of 604 B.C.E., right into the winter when the rains begin, sometimes falling in torrents. Ordinarily, nobody would think of conducting military operations—especially campaigns so dependent on horse and chariot—

during the rainy season. But late in 604 B.C.E. Nebuchadrezzar decided to strike at the primary seaport of the Philistines—Ashkelon. At least that is what we are told in the fragmentary *Babylonian Chronicle* written in cuneiform:

(Nebuchadrezzar) *marched to the city of Ashkelon and captured it in the month of Kislev* (November/December)*. He captured its king and plundered it and carried off [spoil from it …]. He turned the city into a mound* (Akkadian ana tili, literally a tell) *and heaps of ruins …*[3]

Usually, when an ancient city was besieged, the gates and fortifications were the first features to come under attack. If the assault on these fortifications was successful, the defenders normally surrendered and the rest of the city was spared.[a] That was not what happened at Ashkelon, however, according to Nebuchadrezzar's version of events. For his description to be accurate, Nebuchadrezzar's armies must have advanced far into the interior of the city and reduced this major metropolis to a heap of ruins—in other words, made it a tell.



The Babylonian campaigns (609–586 B.C.E.)
Green line: Nabopolassar's campaigns (609–605 B.C.E.)
Purple line: Nebuchadrezzar II's campaigns (605–601 B.C.E.)
Red line: Nebuchadrezzar II's campaigns (599–586 B.C.E.)

The Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon has given us an opportunity to test the accuracy of the Babylonian ruler's account. It has also provided us with a detailed still life of a Philistine metropolis in the late seventh century B.C.E., on the eve of Nebuchadrezzar's vaunted destruction of the city.

As a seaport (after 11 seasons of terrestrial excavations and 4 of underwater exploration, we have found anchors and ballast from several shipwrecks; however, we are still searching for the harbor), Ashkelon provides evidence of diverse international influence. Phoenician Red-Slipped Ware is abundant, as is its locally made version. (This pottery is most abundant at Philistine sites on the Mediterranean coast—Ashkelon and Ashdod—and is significantly rarer at contemporaneous sites on the inner coastal plain, such as Ekron [Tel Miqne] and Timnah [Tel Batash].)

Cargoes from Phoenician ports such as Tyre arrived in Ashkelon loaded with elegant bowls and cups of Phoenician Fine Ware, including so-called Samaria Ware as well as red- and cream-polished table ware, the latter imitating ivory or alabaster. The prophet Jeremiah was an insightful observer of the geopolitics of his day in referring to Philistia as the "helper" of Tyre and Sidon (Jeremiah 47:4). A special trading relationship between Philistia and Phoenicia, known as *hubūr*, has been inferred from the 11th-century B.C.E. Egyptian "Tale of Wenamon." [4] Such trading agreements persisted into the late seventh century B.C.E., and it is to those agreements that Jeremiah alludes.

Phoenician (and perhaps Philistine) ships also brought amphoras and fine wares from Ionia, the Greek islands, Corinth and Cyprus. Elegant wine pitchers (*oinochoai*) decorated with wild goats, stags, and geese arrived from East Greece. Ionian drinking cups (*skyphoi*) were also on board.

At Ashkelon, commerce and religion apparently marched hand in hand. We found an ostracon, a potsherd with writing on it, used as a receipt in a room with smashed jars, charred wheat, weights and a scale balance. On top of this rubble was the collapsed roof of the building, which consisted of reed-impressed and mat-impressed clay. Sitting on top of the roof debris was a small incense altar (without horns) made of sandstone and used to offer incense, such as myrrh and frankincense, to Philistine deities.

This is the first time anyone has found stratified evidence for rooftop altars. In his catalogue of Judah's sins, Jeremiah lists rooftop rituals such as incense offerings, and wine and oil libations, in worship of pagan deities. He declares that the "Chaldeans [Babylonians] who are fighting against this city [Jerusalem] shall come, set it on fire, and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to Baal and libations have been poured out to other gods, to provoke me [Yahweh] to anger" (Jeremiah 32:29). Jeremiah obviously knew what he was talking about, and we now have an example of a rooftop altar from Ashkelon.



Carl Andrews, Leon Levy Expedition

Mudbrick towers protected Ashkelon's 10,000–12,000 inhabitants along a mile-and-a-half arc. The Philistine city's defenses consisted of as many as 50 towers, evenly spaced along a mudbrick fortification wall built on top of artificial ramparts—made of a thick sheath of sand, soil and debris—surrounding the city. These earthen ramparts, known as glacis construction, were originally built by Canaanites in about 2000 B.C.E.; they were then rebuilt in Iron Age II (1000–586 B.C.E.) by the Philistines, when these towers were also constructed.

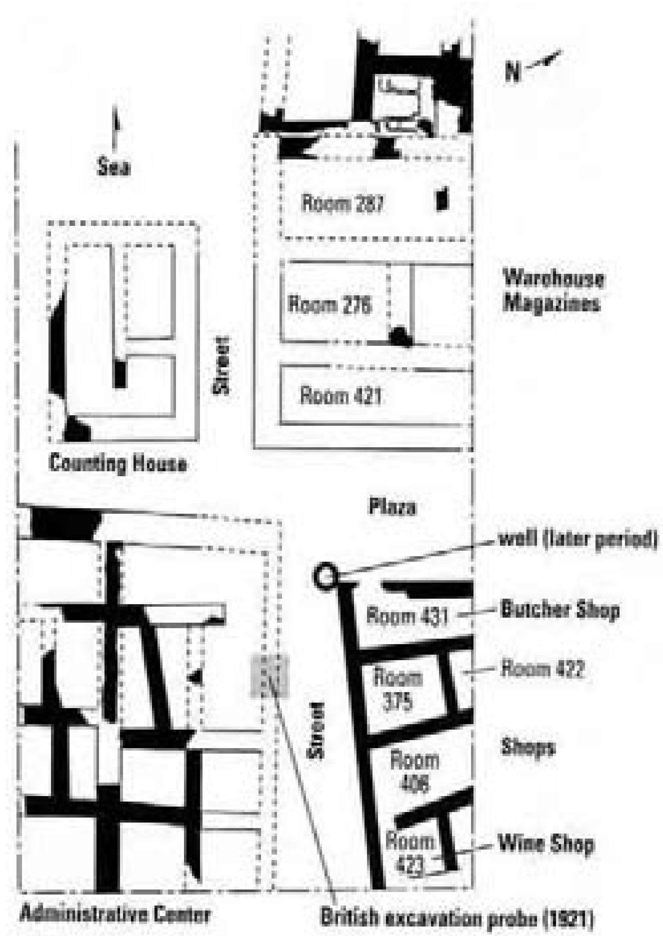


Carl Andrews, Leon Levy Expedition

The "streets" of Ashkelon are mentioned in David's lament over the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:20). The Hebrew word *hûssōt*, however, does not mean "streets" but "bazaars"; David warns the Israelites not to proclaim the news of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in the famous bazaars of Israel's enemy, lest Philistine women rejoice at Israel's loss of its royalty.

The photo looks west toward the sea, along Ashkelon's marketplace. The main street runs toward the sea just to the right of the large hole (the 1921 British excavation probe) in the foreground; to the left of the street is the Administrative Center (no longer visible because the excavators have dug below it), and to the right are the shops. Beyond the shops, just past the small hole at right center, is the Plaza—an open square. To the left of the far end of the Plaza is the Counting House; some of its rooms are visible in the photo. In the Counting House excavators found an ostracon (an inscribed potsherd) that was used as a receipt for a shipment of grain.

Egyptian influence, both commercial and religious, has been documented far beyond our expectations. Among the Egyptian artifacts we found were barrel jars and tripod stands made of Nile clay and a jewelry box made of abalone shell, in which a necklace of Egyptian (or Phoenician) amulets found nearby had once been kept. But there were also Egyptian religious items found in a building we identified as a winery. A bronze statuette of Osiris lay near a cache of seven bronze bottles (*situlae*). A procession of Egyptian deities in relief files around the bottles. In the midst of the cache of bronze bottles was a bronze votive offering table engraved with what appears to be a loaf of bread flanked by libation flasks.



Plan of the Ashkelon marketplace.

Two baboons sit at opposite corners of the offering table. At another corner sits a falcon; a jackal crouches at the fourth corner. Between the jackal and the falcon is a frog. The most prominent deity represented on the *situlae* is Min or Amen-Re, with an erect phallus. Although not especially clear from this example, from other statues of Min we can interpret what is happening here: The god masturbates with his left hand and raises his right hand in a gesture of joy or pleasure.[5] In Egyptian creation myths, divine masturbatory semen provides the initial life-giving force from which all other generative power derives.[6] These bronze bottles probably contained offerings of actual semen or liquids, such as milk or water, symbolic of this revivifying fluid.

A "twin" of our bronze Osiris statuette was uncovered more than 60 years ago in a small salvage excavation at Ashkelon. The excavator, J.H. Iliffe, dated it to the fourth century B.C.E., but it is now clear that this statuette and 25 other bronze statuettes of Egyptian deities, as well as 14 other Egyptian bronze artifacts (including cube-shaped weights) found in Iliffe's excavation were contemporaneous with our bronzes—that is, late seventh century B.C.E., not fourth century B.C.E.[7]

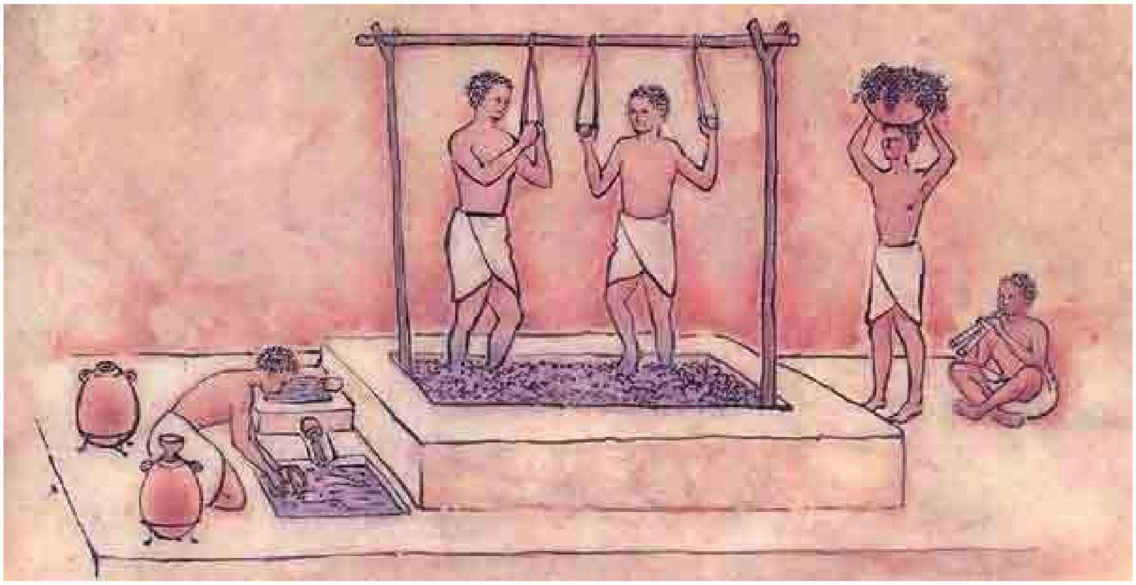
What were all these Egyptian artifacts doing at Ashkelon? Very probably there was an Egyptian enclave there with its own sanctuary.



Carl Andrews, Leon Levy Expedition

Fat-bellied jars, such as the four largest vessels in the photo, were used by Philistines for fermenting and storing wine. As a port and trading center, Ashkelon was visited by ships from various places in the eastern Mediterranean, such as Phoenicia to the north: Cargo-laden ships from Sidon and Tyre arrived in Ashkelon with goods stored in ceramic jars—like the curving tapered jar at far right and the amphora in front of it. At lower left is an example of the distinctive Philistine Red-Slipped Ware. The inverted bowl combines the form of Assyrian-style pottery (characterized by a sharp shoulder and flaring rim) with the decoration of Phoenician Fine Ware (characterized by a burnished red slip and a reserve pattern resembling so-called Samaria Ware).

The building in which these Egyptian artifacts were found was in the center of the city. Three rooms in this monumental building contained wine presses, hence our designation of the building as a winery. The winery platforms, vats and basins were lined with cobblestones and coated with smooth, shell-tempered plaster of unusually high quality. The best preserved wine press had a shallow plastered platform (where the grapes were pressed by foot) with a low rim on all four sides; the rim on one side had a small hole through which the grape juice flowed into a channel leading to an intermediate-sized plastered tank or vat. Another channel drained the juice into a deeper plastered vat, with a small sump or catchment in the corner. Juice from Ashkelon's wine presses was decanted into wine jars and left to ferment in adjacent storerooms. Dipper juglets and fat-bellied storage jars (amphoras) with pointed bases and protruding handles were the predominant pottery types found in the winery.



Lina Chesak

Fine wines probably accounted for a good part of Ashkelon’s international allure, along with products from the interior, such as olive oil. Three rooms in one large building contained wine presses consisting of carefully constructed platforms, vats and basins. Built of cobblestones, the presses were coated with an impermeable layer of fine shell-tempered plaster. At the highest level rested the platform where grapes were pressed by foot; the juice then flowed into a channel leading to settling vats, from which it flowed into other channels emptying into larger basins. From the basins, the juice was collected in jars, fermented and sold.

We also found in this building dozens and dozens of puzzling unbaked clay balls, some as large as grapefruits, with a single perforation through the center. At first we thought they might be loom weights for weaving. Since wine-making is a seasonal activity that takes place during and after the grape harvest in August/September, perhaps the building was used for weaving during other seasons. But many of these clay balls are too large and heavy to be loom weights.

The more probable explanation connects them to wine production: They fit nicely into the mouth of the fat-bellied storage jar, the most common Philistine wine jar found at Ashkelon. When wine ferments, it gives off gases. To prevent explosions, the gases are released, sometimes through a bunghole in the side of the wine jar or cask. Of course, a puncture in the side of a pottery vessel damages it permanently. The same effect, without damaging the vessel, could be obtained if perforated stoppers, such as these clay spheres, were sealed in the mouth of the jar, and the hole opened or closed at the appropriate time to release the gases. Israeli archaeologist Zvi Gal was the first to propose the function of these clay balls, which he found in an excavation at Hurvat Rosh Zayit, and we think he is right. If the clay spheres are not loom weights, then there is no reason for us to believe that the winery was converted into a textile factory during the off season.



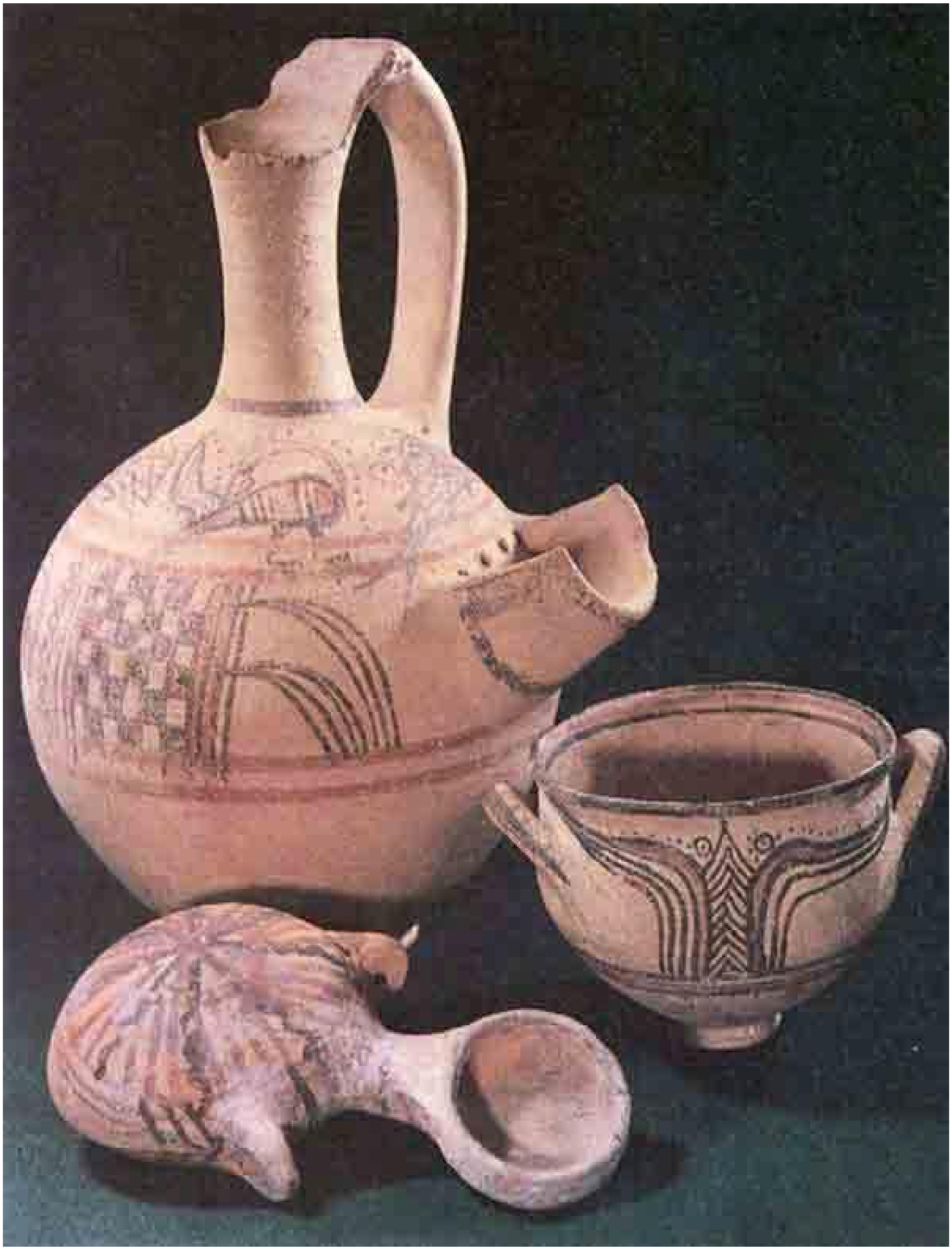
Carl Andrews, Leon Levy Expedition

Dozens of clay balls, found in the winery, posed a dilemma for the excavators. What were they? Most likely, they are wine-jar stoppers. The clay balls fit easily into the mouths of fat-bellied storage jars. Plugging the jars during fermentation, the stoppers allowed the build-up of gases to be released at regular intervals through their perforations.

The winery at Ashkelon shatters another modern myth about the Philistines: that they were beer-guzzling louts. One of the most characteristic pottery vessels found at Philistine sites is a jug with a strainer spout, commonly referred to as a Philistine “beer jug.” [8]

The strainer supposedly functioned to strain out the beer dregs. The ecology of Philistia, however, favors the production of grapes over barley. The sandy soils and warm, sunny climate of the coastal plain produced many palatable wines, ranging from the light varieties at Ashkelon to the heavier ones at Gaza.[9] The winery at Ashkelon and similar contemporaneous wine presses recently excavated near Ashdod suggest that coastal Philistia was an important producer of wine both for local consumption and for export. Wine, not beer, was the beverage of choice. The “beer-jugs” really served as carafes for wine. The strainer spout acted as a built-in sieve, which filtered out the lees and other impurities. To remove even finer unwanted particles from the wine, the pourer might have placed a linen cloth over the ceramic strainer.[10] The Philistines were not the only winebibbers to filter their wine. Egyptian wall reliefs depict royalty and nobility pouring wine through sieves into their drinking bowls or cups.

While Ashkelon produced wine, Philistine Ekron, located in the inner coastal zone, with its expansive rolling fields of deep fertile soils, was the undisputed olive oil capital of the country; if not the world.[11] More than a hundred olive oil factories lined the outer industrial belt of Ekron. The coast and interior of Philistia thus formed complementary zones for the production of two of the most important cash crops of the Levant—olive oil and wine. Largely because of these exports to Egypt and other Mediterranean countries, Philistia grew fat from its oil and heady from its wine during the last half of the seventh century B.C.E.[b]



David Harris, Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon

The finished wines were served in a so-called "beer-jug" (similar to the earlier example shown here). Nothing could be further from the truth than the image of the Philistines as loutish, beer-guzzling thugs. Not only was their craftsmanship superb, but they drank wine: The "beer-jug" is really a wine decanter, with small perforations in the spout to strain out sediment.

The bazaar, or marketplace, of Ashkelon overlooked the sea. A row of shops flanked the street on one side. The floor of one of the shops (Room 423) was littered with dipper juglets and wine jars. It might well have been a wine shop. Just outside the shop lay an ostracon, which Professor Frank Cross has dated to the late seventh century based on the shape and form of the letters. The inscription lists so many units (bottles) of red wine (*yn dm*) and so many units of *šēkār*. The verb-form of this latter term means to get drunk, so the noun-form is usually translated as "strong drink"; it probably refers to a particularly strong wine made from dates and known as *šakrā* in Syriac.[12] To this day, date palms thrive in the Yadin National Park, where the tell of Ashkelon is located.

Another shop (Room 431) contained cuts of meat, including two complete forelegs of beef, which prompted staff zooarchaeologist Brian Hesse to label this the Butcher Shop (see the sidebar "The Zooarchaeological Record: Pigs' Feet, Cattle Bones and Birds' Wings"). It is easy to imagine the various cuts of meat hanging in the windows and doorway of this shop in Philistine times, much as they do today in the meat-markets of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Without doubt, the most famous reference to Ashkelon is the lament of David on the death of his friend Prince Jonathan and King Saul at the hands of the Philistines (2 Samuel 1:20):

Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

The Hebrew word translated as "streets" is *hûssōt*. It does not really mean "streets," however. As Benjamin Mazar pointed out 30 years ago, the word means "bazaars." The poet who composed this early Hebrew verse knew about Ashkelon as a great commercial center and entrepôt, where news and information traveled fast. Was it the bazaars of Ashkelon that the poet had in mind? The bazaar was the most bustling part of any Middle Eastern city, then as now. The bazaar that we uncovered from the late seventh century was probably not much different in layout or function from the earlier bazaars to which the Biblical elegist alludes.

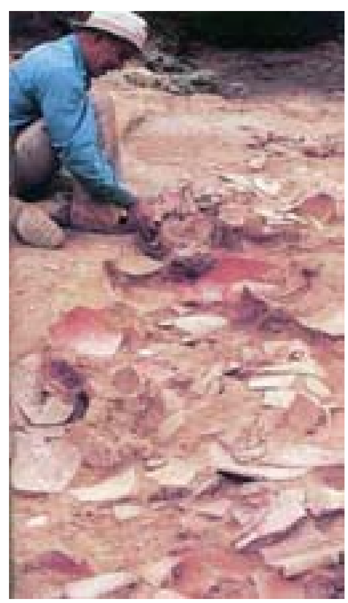
Across the street from the shops was a major public building, probably the town's administrative center. As one walked toward the sea, past the shops on the right and the administrative center on the left, the street opened up into a square, which we have dubbed "Piazza Philistina." Bordering the west side of the plaza is a series of long narrow rooms (Rooms 421, 276 and 287), probably magazines of a warehouse, where produce and goods were stored before being put on sale in the shops. Turning left at the plaza, a narrow corridor leads to a square building on the right, tentatively identified as the "counting house" because of some of the small finds located there. Nearby were a dozen scale weights of bronze and stone along with two bronze pieces of pans and part of a bronze beam from a scale balance. An ostracon found there

appears to be a receipt for grain paid for in silver (see the sidebar “The Epigraphical Record: A Philistine Ostracon from Ashkelon”). In this period just prior to the introduction of minted coinage in the Levant, ingots, jewelry and precious metals served as currency. By the seventh century B.C.E., commodities were often paid for in silver.[13] Prices could be compared using an equivalent unit of value, such as a shekel weight of silver.

The script on the ostracon is also interesting. It is an alphabetic script similar to, but not identical with, Hebrew and Phoenician, peculiar to Philistia in the seventh century B.C.E. When the Philistines first came to the eastern Mediterranean littoral from the Mycenaean world (including coastal Asia Minor, Crete and the Cyclades, and other sites) in the early 12th century B.C.E., they probably brought with them a language related to Greek and a script that will be related to Linear B—whenever it is found; we still have no sure example of early Philistine writing. Our ostracon indicates that by the seventh century B.C.E., and perhaps as early as the time of David and Solomon, the Philistines were using a local script and had adopted a Semitic dialect as well.

One thing is clear: this large, sophisticated Philistine metropolis of the late seventh century B.C.E. was thoroughly destroyed. The destruction of Philistine Ashkelon was complete and final. The Iron Age, in archaeological terms, had ended. Archaeology cannot be so precise as to date the destruction of Ashkelon to 604 B.C.E., but the *Babylonian Chronicle* leaves little doubt that the late seventh-century destruction we found all over the site, followed by a 75- to 80-year gap in occupation until the Persian Period, was the work of Nebuchadrezzar in 604 B.C.E.

Earlier in the late eighth-early seventh centuries the Assyrians had made a serious investment in the West. They established administrative provinces where former kingdoms and city-states had been. They developed a complex imperial apparatus and infrastructure to insure that Mediterranean wealth was siphoned into their coffers. Nebuchadrezzar probably lacked the capability of imposing an effective imperial bureaucracy on these small Mediterranean states as Assyria had done.



Carl Andrews, Leon Levy Expedition

Images of destruction. Ashkelon’s excavators found evidence of Babylonian devastation throughout the city: smashed pottery, charcoal, vitrified brick, charred wheat, collapsed roofs and debris.

His overriding concern was with Egypt. And his instrument of foreign policy toward real or potential allies of Egypt was a blunt one—annihilation, and for those who survived, deportation. Throughout Philistia, and later throughout Judah, his scorched-earth policy created a veritable wasteland west of the Jordan River. Those fortunate enough to survive this devastation were usually deported to Babylonia.

Philistines, Jews and many others were exiled to Babylonia by Nebuchadrezzar. He needed deportees to repopulate and rehabilitate his empire after the depletion of its manpower in the earlier Assyro-Babylonian wars.[14] In a rations list in cuneiform, dated to 592 B.C.E., we find prominent Ashkelonians serving Nebuchadrezzar in Babylon: two sons of Aga (the last king of Philistine Ashkelon), three mariners, several officials and chief musicians—all deportees from Ashkelon.[15]

A century and a half later, as we know from the Murashu Archive, masses of deportees from the West had been settled in the Nippur region, southeast of Babylon. Philistines from Ashkelon and Gaza were living in their own ethnic communities located along canals leading into Nippur, where they were doing business with a big firm run by the Jewish Murashu family.[16]

Only with Cyrus the Great, the Persian successor to the Babylonians, does the archaeological record begin again in Ashkelon (where Phoenicians settled; Philistines did not return from the diaspora)—as in Jerusalem[c] and in Judah, where many Jewish exiles returned to their homeland.

According to the Chronicler, writing in the fifth century B.C.E., long after Nebuchadrezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Judah “lay desolate” for 70 years “until the land had made up for its sabbaths” (2 Chronicles 36:20–23).

Before Nebuchadrezzar’s juggernaut advanced toward Ashkelon, the Philistines probably felt secure in their well-fortified city of 10,000–12,000 inhabitants. They had refortified the seaport by adding another thick sheath of sand and debris over the mile-and-a-half arc of artificial earthen ramparts (the so-called glacis construction) around the city. We have excavated two large mudbrick towers on the crest of the glacis, about 60 feet apart. If this pattern persists along the crest of the arc, as many as 50 towers may have fortified the city when Nebuchadrezzar attacked. This fortification system was destroyed at the end of the seventh century B.C.E., presumably by Nebuchadrezzar’s forces.

In the winery mentioned earlier, remnants of charred wood were all that remained of the paneling that once framed mudbrick doorjambs. Indeed, the path of fiery destruction could be traced throughout the building by carefully observing the crushed pottery, charcoal, vitrified mudbrick, and wall and ceiling fragments. There was no doubt that the building had come to an abrupt and catastrophic end. We may conclude that vineyards that took numerous generations of peace, stability and nurturing to produce were destroyed almost overnight by Nebuchadrezzar and his vandals.

As with the winery, so with the "counting house." A large container of olive oil had spilled on the floor; when the fires of destruction reached that part of the building, they burned so hot that mud bricks and other clay materials were vitrified.

The rest of the bazaar, too, was plundered and pillaged in every area. In the winter of 604 B.C.E., wailing and despair replaced the joy and laughter that had once rung throughout the Ashkelon bazaar. Everywhere in the bazaar we found smashed pottery vessels by the hundreds amid the destruction debris, much of it identical to what we saw in the winery.

Evidence of just how far into the city Nebuchadrezzar's troops proceeded came to light in one of the shops of the bazaar (Room 406), where we found the skeleton of a middle-aged woman, about 35 years old, who had been crouching down among the storage jars, attempting to hide from the attackers. When we found her, she was lying on her back, her legs flexed and akimbo, her left arm reaching toward her head. The skull was badly fragmented. We removed the skeleton to the laboratory of physical anthropologist Patricia Smith of Hebrew University, who carefully reconstructed the skull and determined that the woman had been clubbed in the head with a blunt instrument.



Carl Andrews, Leon Levy Expedition

Ashkelon's excavators found evidence of Babylonian devastation throughout the city. The most disturbing sign of the invaders' ferocity, however, lay in one of the bazaar's shops: the skeleton of a 35-year-old woman, who had sought to hide from her attackers among the shop's large storage jars. Lying on her back with her legs recoiled in terror, she lifted her left arm up to her head, as if to ward off a blow. The physical anthropologist who examined this skeleton determined that the woman had been clubbed in the head with a blunt instrument.

"Ashkelon is silenced," wailed the prophet Jeremiah at the destruction of Israel's arch enemy; "For the Lord is destroying the Philistines" (Jeremiah 47:5, 4).

After destroying Philistine Ashkelon, Nebuchadrezzar moved on to the inland Philistine city of Ekron (Tel Miqne), which is being excavated by a joint Israeli-American team headed by Hebrew University professor Trude Dothan and the director of the W.F. Albright School of Archaeological Research, Seymour Gitin. The devastation of Ekron at the hands of Nebuchadrezzar in 603 B.C.E. (or perhaps in 601 B.C.E.) has left an incredible yield of material remains, including thousands of whole or restorable pots, animal bones and a rich array of small finds, including several Egyptian objects.

During the seventh century B.C.E., the kings of Judah vacillated between Egypt and Babylonia half a dozen times or more. Ashkelon and Ekron cast their lots with Egypt. Although Nebuchadrezzar never succeeded in conquering Egypt itself, he was nevertheless able to reduce Egypt's actual and potential allies and client-states to rubble.[d] Eventually, the pro-Egyptian policy of Judah (against the counsel of Jeremiah) led to the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah in 586 B.C.E. The First Temple period was at an end.

Vegas on the Med

A Tour of Caesarea's Entertainment District

By Yosef Porath

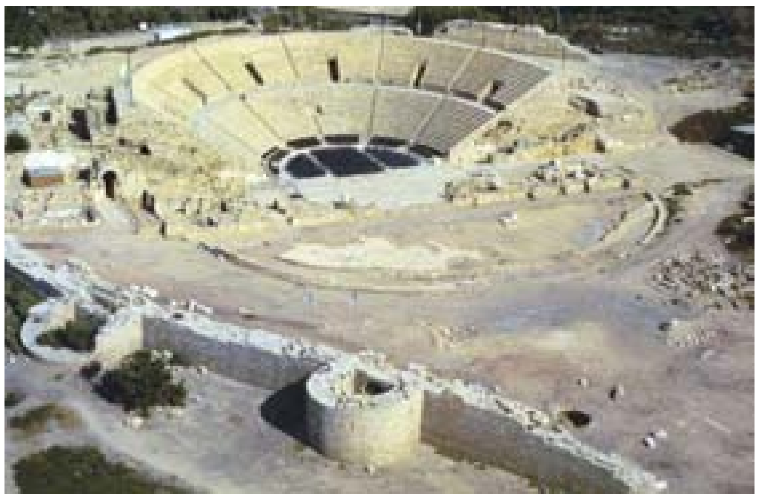


Photo by Aaron Levin

The elegant 5,000-seat theater at Caesarea, once the capital of Roman Palestine, was one of many public entertainment buildings concentrated in the center of town.

What city was the official residence of the Roman prefect after Judea came under direct rule by Rome beginning in 6 C.E.?

What city was designated as capital of the Roman province of Judea after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E?

What city was the political and economic capital of the country from the institution of the Roman prefecture to the Arab conquest more than 600 years later?

What was the largest and most important city in Judea (called Palestina after Hadrian suppressed the Second Jewish Revolt in 135 C.E.) during the first to the seventh century C.E.?

If you are tempted to answer Jerusalem to any of these questions, you would be wrong.

And the answer to all the questions is the same: Caesarea Maritima.

Built by Herod the Great to honor his patron Caesar Augustus, Caesarea Maritima (to distinguish it from the inland Caesarea Philippi) was built at the site of a small Hellenistic port called Straton's Tower, about 25 miles north of modern Tel Aviv. Herod took 12 years to construct Caesarea Maritima (from 22 B.C.E. to 10/9 B.C.E.). Caesarea and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which Herod expanded and completely rebuilt, remain the two most ambitious projects of the first-century B.C.E.'s greatest real estate developer (among other things). As two observers have remarked, "In the Herodian state, [Caesarea] was a pagan and Greek counterweight to Jewish Jerusalem."[1]

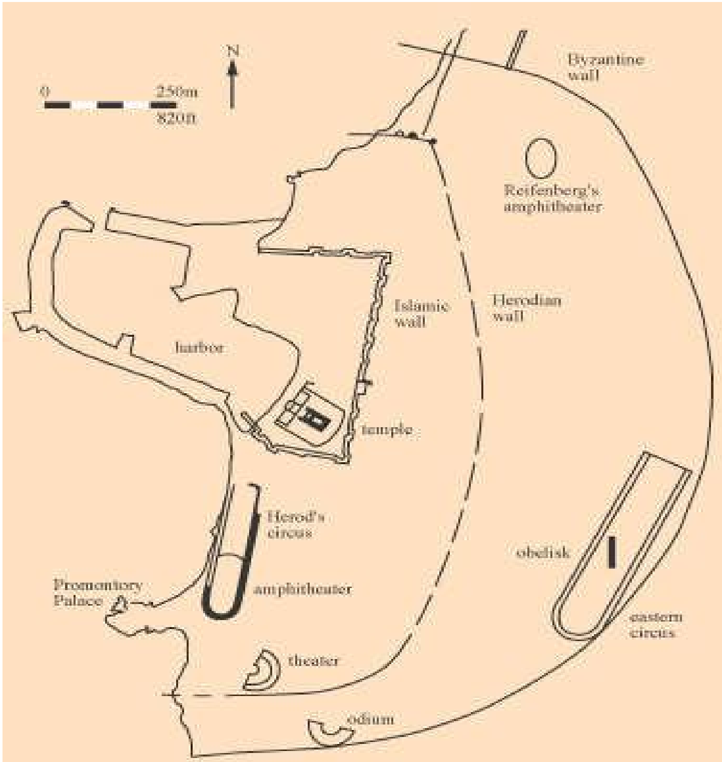


The plan indicates the central locations of ancient Caesarea's harbor, temple, two circuses, amphitheaters and odium. All that's missing is a gambling casino.

Herod built Caesarea on the plan of a typical Roman city. The city was subdivided into *insulae* (square city blocks) by a grid of parallel and perpendicular streets located half a *stade* apart (a *stade* is about 600 feet). Herod's city also included a temple dedicated to Augustus and Rome in the center of the city, a palace, a forum (marketplace), a magnificent harbor with a breakwater that would safely accommodate the largest ships and a semicircular wall enclosing the city. Caesarea Maritima soon became the major port of the country.

Naturally, the city also included facilities for public entertainment—theatrical performances, musical offerings, chariot races, athletic contests, gladiator combats, animal shows and the like—some built by Herod and others added later.

Herod built a theater in Jerusalem as well, but only the one in Caesarea has survived.[a] Herod's Caesarea theater was repaired many times over the years, and in the second-third century C.E. (during the Severan dynasty [193–235 C.E.]), it was entirely rebuilt. Little of the Herodian theater survived the Severan-period rebuilding, however, and, what little did survive, is buried under the later Imperial theater. The Imperial theater continued in operation until the end of the Byzantine period; after the Arab conquest of 640 C.E., it became part of a large fortress area.[2]



The map at left locates Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast.

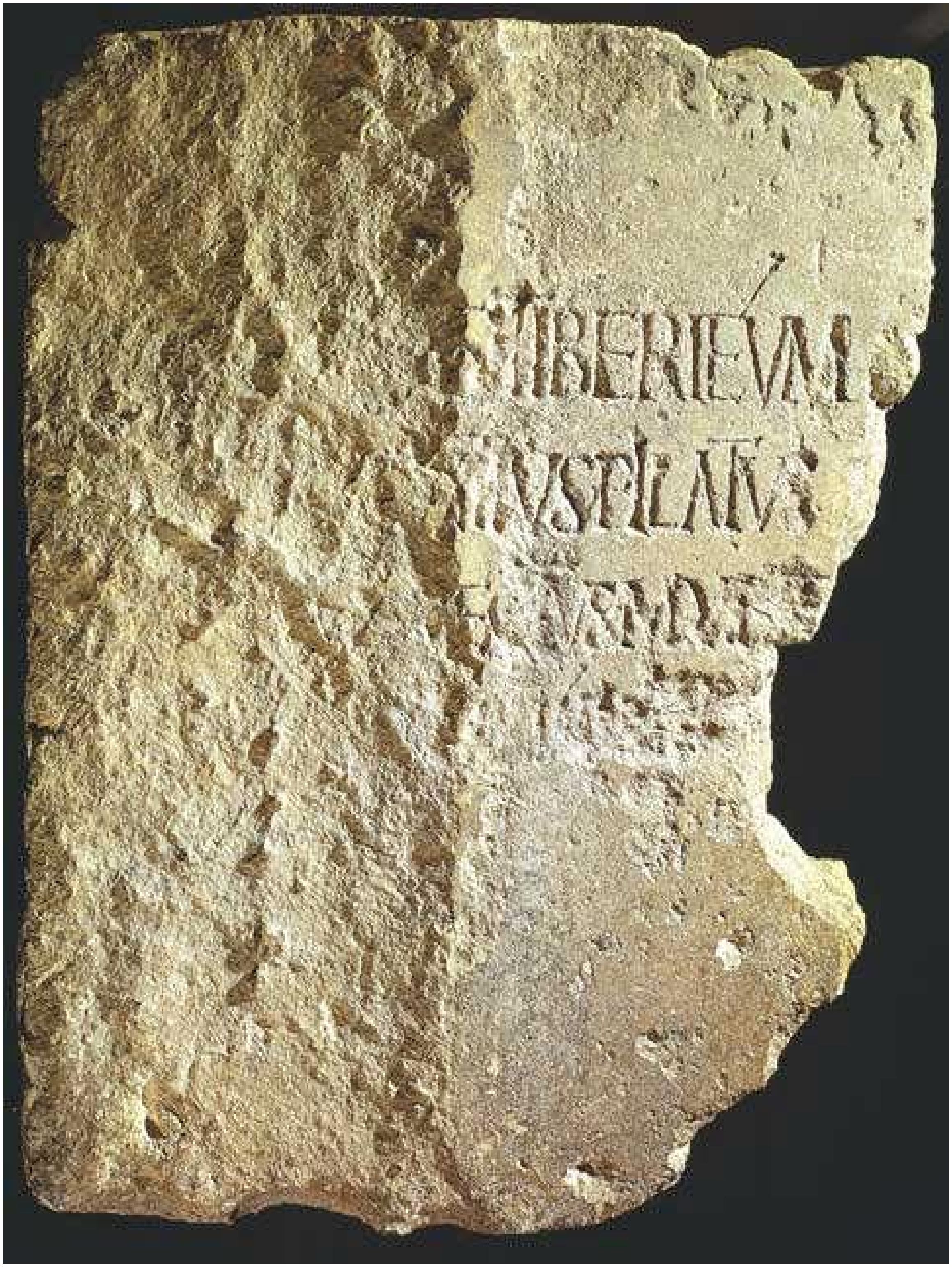
The Imperial theater was first excavated in the 1960s by an Italian team led by Antonio Frova. It is the largest theater ever excavated in Israel.

Between 1994 and 2000, I led several rescue excavations in the vicinity of the theater on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

It was the Italian team, however, who found the famous Pontius Pilate inscription. When the Roman emperor Augustus deposed Herod's son Archelaus in 6 B.C., Judea was reorganized as a sub-province of the province of Syria and was ruled by a governor called a prefect. Pilate held the office of Prefect of Judea from 26 to 36 C.E. and his official residence was in Caesarea. When the theater was remodeled in the third century C.E., the builders reused a stone plaque with an inscription on it in a small staircase in the new theater. It measures 32 inches by 27 inches. Unfortunately, the beginning of all four lines has been defaced, but enough is there to restore everything but the first word:

"... the Tiberium, which Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea, gave [and] dedicated."[3]

This inscription is the only archaeological confirmation of Pilate's existence. The Tiberium, which is mentioned in the inscription, was a temple erected to the Emperor Tiberias. The inscription also demonstrates that Pilate's title was Prefect, and not, as so often stated, Procurator.



David Harris

An inscription found at Caesarea in the 1950s is the only archaeological confirmation of Pontius Pilate's existence. Though the left half is obscured, all but the first word can be deciphered: "... the Tiberium, which Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea, gave [and] dedicated." It was discovered in secondary use as part of a third-century staircase.

One of the few elements of the earlier Herodian theater that the excavators did find was the floor of the orchestra below the marble floor of the Imperial theater. The Herodian floor was made of painted plaster. The excavators found 14 successive layers of plaster decorated with colored fish-scale, geometric and floral designs sometimes with imitation of colorful marble or stone floor tiles. The orchestra (the area in front of the proscenium, or stage) is semicircular, as in Roman theaters, rather than round (a full circle), as in earlier Greek theaters.

The floor of the later Imperial theater had a marble *opus sectile* floor, forming a design of marble slabs. Most of this is gone, however, recycled for construction in the early Islamic period, either as building blocks or burnt in lime kilns.

The semicircular orchestra of the Herodian theater measured 80 feet in diameter. The Imperial remodeling of the theater extended the semicircular orchestra into a large circular basin by the addition of a semicircular area (called the *scenae frons*) behind the stage. It was used for nautical games.

The Imperial theater had six or seven wedges of stone seats rising high above the orchestra. In the central wedge was a rectangular box, no doubt for the governor. Throughout, the carefully fashioned tiers of seats were decorated with fine molded edge carved from hard *kurkar* stone. Unfortunately, the seats were destroyed in antiquity; only the bases are *in situ*. However, 26 of the assumed 39 original tiers of seats have now been restored to accommodate modern performances. The Imperial theater could hold more than 5,000 people; six entrance vaults (*vomitoria*) led into the theater. The theater has been reconstructed in modern times and is again used for performances; today it can hold 3,800 spectators.



Ofek Aerial Photography Ltd.

An aerial photo of Caesarea today captures the prominence of large public buildings in the city's design, as well as Herod's taste for homes with dramatic views. At the tip of the promontory at center are the remains of what was once Herod's palace, which would have had a commanding view of the city and harbor and, above all, a spectacular view of the sea. Just above the palace to the right is the distinct shape of the theater. To the left, parallel to the beach, is the long oval of the circus, part of which was later closed off into a circle to form another circus. At far left is part of Herod's harbor, with its impressive breakwater extending into the sea.

Around the theater is a well-preserved defense wall with semicircular towers. It may seem at first to be a city wall, but it is not. It is the wall of the fortress into which the theater was incorporated in the seventh century. The semicircular towers help us to date it. They contrast with the square towers of the Byzantine city wall.

Herod's Caesarea also included a circus (the Greeks called it a hippodrome). Excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Combined Caesarea Expedition, the Caesarea circus was used principally for chariot racing, although it was apparently used for foot races as well. We discovered four lanes in the eastern part of the circus, but there was room for four more (eight was the common number of lanes in a circus). For the chariot races, the chariots were harnessed with either two horses (*bigae*) or four horses (*quadrigae*).

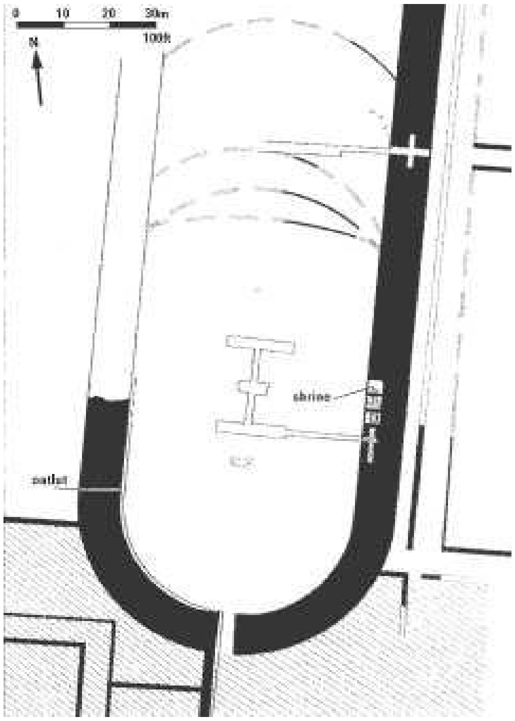
Herod's structure was a typical Roman circus of the Augustan period. It is a long U-shaped structure with starting gates at one end. The arena was nearly 1,000 feet long and roughly 170 feet wide. The seating area had 12 tiers of seats, enough to accommodate 5,000 people. The seats were separated from the arena by a wide and deep dugout.

At the southeast end of the U-shaped circus, a small shrine was quarried into bedrock under the tiers of seats. Such shrines were common in Roman circuses.[4] This shrine had two openings with a niche in each one. We found a Greek inscription in the shrine reading "Merismos [the] charioteer." We also found four marble, human-shaped feet in the shrine; all four are right feet. Votive body parts are often found in such shrines. The votives protect the power, energy, might or health of the offerant.



Yosef Porath

These votive limbs were often found in shrines at Roman circuses and were intended to bring favor to the offerant.

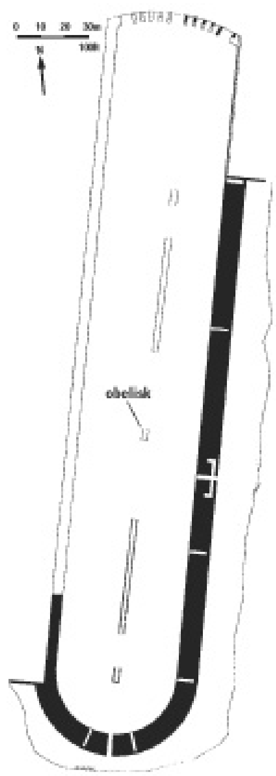


After Herod's circus fell into disuse in about the beginning of the fourth century C.E., part of the structure was converted into an amphitheater by closing off the southern half of the circus with a wall (marked on the plan).

Interestingly enough, above the pagan shrine was a later wall (from the fifth-sixth century) on the plaster of which was etched a person with a halo, fishermen and boats. We suspect, as so often happens, that the religious nature of the site was preserved but transformed to serve the later Christian community.

The amphitheater was a Roman invention designed as a permanent facility for gladiatorial combat and hunting games. The space in Herod's circus was converted to an amphitheater by a wall across the circus sealing off the southern part of the structure. The wild animals used in combat between humans and beasts would thereby be prevented from escaping. The larger Roman amphitheaters could accommodate an audience of tens of thousands.

The floor of the amphitheater sloped gently from the center to the sides, enclosed by a wall separating the arena from the seats. This wall is called the podium wall. In the amphitheater, the podium wall was plastered and painted with designs of animals and a human image in front of schematic plants. The species include elephant, rhinoceros, leopard, deer, dog or wolf, a member of the equus family (either a horse or a zebra), fox and rabbit. Unfortunately only the lower third of the human image has survived. The man, who wears colorful trousers, is probably either an animal trainer or a gladiator. Exposed to the elements, the paintings naturally frequently required maintenance and repair. Three cycles of general repairs were observed over the animal design, including dozens of repaintings and uncounted retouchings. On the first two cycles after the animal paintings, the wall was painted to imitate marble slabs. In the last cycle, the plaster was left unpainted.



In a Roman circus, he track was long and straight with tall columns marking each end. The charioteers, with chariots of two horses or four, commonly raced for seven laps. Surviving was almost as difficult as winning: The sharp turns and high speeds made chariot races nearly as bloody as combat games with gladiators and wild animals. Good crack-ups, known as *naufragia* (shipwrecks), would have pleased the crowd and caused several fatalities.



A day at the races. An artist's rendering depicts a chariot race at a typical Roman circus. Eight lanes were common to Roman circuses, and at Caesarea excavators found four plus room for four more.

Built outside the Herodian city wall, the U-shaped eastern circus was nearly 1,500 feet long and almost 300 feet wide, compared to Herod's circus, which was only 1,000 feet long and 170 feet wide. The eastern circus could have held up to 20,000-25,000 spectators, although the exact number is unknown since we do not know how many tiers of seats there may have been.

The eastern circus was first explored by Claude Conder and H.H. Kitchener in the late 19th century. On the surface were three columns made of red granite from Aswan in Egypt, the marble bases of which were found only four years ago. An even more exciting find was three pieces of a fallen obelisk that once stood in the center of the arena of the circus. Two pieces of the obelisk that fit together were over 34 feet long. The third piece was a fragment of the pyramid on top of the obelisk. The pyramid would have been nearly 5 feet high. The rest of the obelisk is missing, but a large red granite pedestal that may have been the base was found 200 feet north of the fallen obelisk.

When the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) excavated part of the eastern circus between 1996 and 1999, we decided to attempt to re-erect the obelisk. It was a much more complicated project than you might expect. The Egyptian obelisks that were re-erected in ancient Roman and Byzantine circuses were all monoliths. So were the ones re-erected since the 16th century in Rome, London, Paris and New York. The task at Caesarea was more complicated because the re-erected obelisk was broken, with missing segments at the bottom and between the trunk and pyramid on top. The IAA appointed a committee of archaeologists, historians, architects and conservators charged with judging the feasibility and ethics of the project. It took the IAA's conservation team more than a year to complete the restoration. A special glue, reinforced by titanium bars inserted into holes drilled on both sides of the segments, assured that the restored obelisk would hold together.

Because we weren't sure that the red granite block was in fact the pedestal of the obelisk, a new concrete pedestal was created. Now the restored obelisk has been re-erected in the center of the arena of the eastern circus. The eastern circus was used for more than 450 years, until the Arab conquest in 640 C.E.

Let's go back to the amphitheater that was created from Herod's old circus. Coin evidence indicates that from about the beginning of the fourth century C.E., the amphitheater was no longer used. There must have been another amphitheater to replace it. It has not yet been found, however (only about 4 percent of Caesarea has been excavated).

But there is a pretty good guess as to where this other amphitheater is located. In December 1944 a set of aerial photographs was taken at Caesarea. Studying one of them, Abraham Reifenberg, an Israeli geographer and historian and an engineer by profession, deciphered an oval feature as an oval amphitheater. Reifenberg identified this oval building as the amphitheater mentioned by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus. But the excavation of

Herod's circus, which included an amphitheater, proved Reifenberg's oval structure was not Josephus's amphitheater.

In 1960, an Israeli expedition headed by Avraham Negev failed to find any stone-constructed tiers at Reifenberg's oval. Nevertheless, Negev recognized that his expedition was not sufficient to disprove Reifenberg's suggestion of an amphitheater at this location. It would be "appropriate to return and examine this site," Negev wrote. I believe Reifenberg was right in deciphering this oval as an amphitheater, but he was wrong in identifying it as the amphitheater Josephus saw in the first century C.E. If this is a standard Roman amphitheater, it was constructed to replace the amphitheater located in the southern part of Herod's circus, probably in the third century C.E. Only large-scale excavations at the site, however, will answer the question definitively.

We have mentioned a place for chariot races, for gladiator combats, animal performances and fights, and theatrical performances. To this list, we must add the more elevated activities of poetry recitations and musical offerings. Perhaps it will come as no surprise that in ancient Caesarea, the need for this elevated entertainment could be met in a smaller facility—called an odium. An odium was typically smaller than a theater, allowing for an audience of only a few hundred, and was often roofed. A Byzantine historian named Malalas tells us that the Emperor Vespasian (69–79 C.E.) built "a very large odium [in Caesarea] the size of a large theater using the spoils of the Jewish war [the Jewish revolt against Rome of 66–70 C.E.]."

In a rescue excavation that I directed in 2000–2001, we may have found the Caesarea odium. Unfortunately, it had been largely dismantled in ancient times (and then covered by sand dunes). It was located near the sea about 600 feet southeast of the Imperial theater. The evidence from our excavation indicates that the structure was not built until the second-third century C.E., however—too late for the structure Malalas describes as having been built by Vespasian. But perhaps our evidence is of a later repair and the basic structure did exist in Vespasian's time? There are several other possibilities. Because of the uncertainties, we have been calling the structure the theater/odium—in case it was simply a second theater unmentioned in the literature. The structure was indeed large, as Malalas had said, but still it was only a little more than half the size of the previously-described Imperial theater to the northwest. Because of its current condition, we could not tell archaeologically whether it was roofed or not.

The final structure for public entertainment in Caesarea was the stadium, where athletic contests were held—races by naked athletes, races by athletes wearing full battle equipment, distance jumps, discus throws, wrestling, boxing, etc. But the Caesarea stadium has so far not been found. It was in the stadium in 26 C.E. that, as Josephus tells us, Pontius Pilate gathered the Jews who protested against the attempt to admit the *signia* of the Roman army into Jerusalem. Once the Jews were inside the stadium, Pilate balked at massacring them and acceded to their demands. It was also in the stadium that Christian martyrs were killed by wild

beasts for refusing to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods during the early years of the fourth century, in what is known as Great Persecution (the event was recorded by Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea [bishop from c. 315–339]).

After Hadrian suppressed the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome (132–135 C.E.), the name of the province of Judea was changed to Palestina (Jerusalem had been renamed Aelia Capitolina a few years earlier). Throughout its history, however, Caesarea was a Roman city, with all appropriate facilities for public entertainment. Josephus described the joyous inauguration of Herod's city, which included "a contest in music and athletic exercises, a great number of gladiators and wild beasts, and also horse races and very lavish shows." If this was true of Herod's city, it was equally true during the reign of his successors and during the Roman and Byzantine periods, when the city was capital of Palestina. Over a span of nearly eight centuries, Caesarea reigned as the cultural center of the country.

How Jewish Was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?

By Mark Chancey and Eric M. Meyers

Sepphoris is a bare 4 miles from Jesus' hometown, Nazareth. So it is not surprising that the ancient city has become central to the study of the historical Jesus, especially because it has been very extensively excavated, while Nazareth has yielded far fewer archaeological remains.

Everyone agrees that to understand Galilee in Jesus' time, it is necessary to understand Sepphoris, but that is where agreement largely ends. The issue is simply stated: What kind of city was Sepphoris when Jesus was growing up in nearby Nazareth and when he was preaching in the surrounding countryside in such places as Capernaum and Bethsaida? Was Sepphoris a Jewish city? Did it have a mixed population? Was it a Hellenistic Roman city?

Some scholars characterize ancient Sepphoris as essentially non-Jewish—as, in the words of one scholar, a "burgeoning Greco-Roman metropolis" with a population of "Jews, Arabs, Greeks, and Romans,"[1] or as an "important Roman cultural and administrative center" with "all the features of a Hellenistic city."[2] Coming from this context, certain scholars argue, Jesus would have had more in common with Greco-Roman philosophers than with rabbis or with classical Hebrew prophetic tradition.

After more than 15 years of excavating at Sepphoris, we believe that this view seriously mischaracterizes what the city was like in Jesus' time. The archaeological evidence indicates that Sepphoris was largely Jewish, as was Galilee in general, albeit with some Hellenistic characteristics. The situation in Jesus' day is best understood, however, in the context of the history of Sepphoris from earliest times until the Byzantine period, hundreds of years after Jesus. So we shall begin at the beginning.



Courtesy Duby Tal and Moni Haramati, Albatross

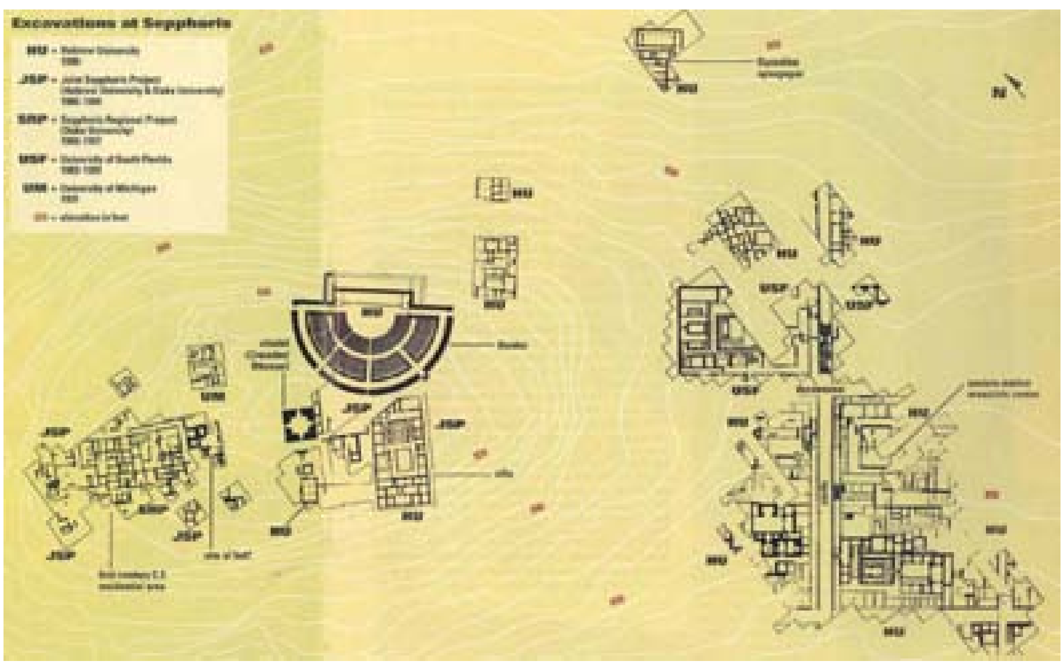
Rising 400 feet above the rolling terrain of central Galilee, the acropolis at Sepphoris is crowned by a late box-shaped citadel (far right) that overlooks excavations in the city's first-century C.E. residential area. Located a mere 4 miles north of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, Sepphoris was a thriving urban center during his lifetime and in the centuries that followed, and many scholars have wondered if Jesus was influenced by the cultural and intellectual trends that prevailed in the nearby city.

Some scholars think Sepphoris was a thoroughly Hellenistic city and try to place the teachings of Jesus in the context of Greco-Roman philosophical traditions. But authors Mark Chancey and Eric Meyers contend that extensive excavation at Sepphoris has only confirmed the opposite view: that first-century Sepphoris was a town with a strong Jewish cultural identity.



Map showing location of Sepphoris.

The Hebrew name for Sepphoris is Zippori. The earliest major rabbinic text, the Mishnah, which dates to about 200 C.E., tells us that Zippori was one of the cities fortified by Joshua when the tribes of Israel first settled in the promised land.[3] Despite many seasons of excavation, it is still not clear whether this tradition is accurate and, if so, whether the text refers to Sepphoris or another site, Tel ‘Ein Zippori, a few miles north of Sepphoris in the Nazareth basin.[4] Two of the earliest artifacts found at Sepphoris date, not from the time of Joshua, but from the fifth to fourth century B.C.E., after the Jews were permitted by the Persian ruler Cyrus the Great to return from the Babylonian Exile. The first item is a black-ware drinking goblet, or *rhyton*, the lower portion, or *protome*, of which resembles the face of a lion, the body of a horse and the outspread wings of a bird.[5] The second artifact is a fragment from a marble or calcite vase originally inscribed in four languages. The text included the name Artaxerxes in the cuneiform signs of the Persian, Elamite and Old Babylonian languages; there was also a version of the text in Egyptian hieroglyphics.[6] Since the Persians are known to have established garrisons at various points along the road system in Syria-Palestine, these fine objects suggest the presence of one such garrison near Sepphoris. They also underscore the city’s strategic location along the major trans-Galilee highway, which linked the area of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee with the Mediterranean coast at Akko.



The archaeological evidence reviewed by the authors derives from years of excavation carried out by several teams. The site plan identifies these teams and indicates where they have conducted their digs at Sepphoris. The residential area is at far left on the plan. Further right, toward the center of the plan, is a 4,000-seat theater. A Roman villa, sumptuously decorated with mosaics, is located just below the theater, near the summit of the city, while at far right, in the lower city, is the eastern market area, neatly bisected by the main north-south street, or *cardo*. A recently identified synagogue is located at the top of the plan.

From the Hellenistic period, we found the remains of a fort constructed in about 200 to 100 B.C.E., when the city was part of the Seleucid[a] Empire. This fort, on the western summit of the site, was probably built by the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III or his successor, Antiochus IV. The Jews successfully rebelled against Antiochus IV in 167 B.C.E., a victory that is still recalled at the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. The victory of Judah Maccabee and his brothers eventually led to the installation of the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled the first independent Jewish state since Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E.[b] The original Seleucid fort was probably taken over by the Hasmoneans in about 100 B.C.E.

The authors find further evidence of Sepphoris's deep Jewish culture in this ostracon (second century B.C.E.). The inscription is a Hebrew transliteration of a Greek word, probably some form of the word *epimeletes*, which is Greek for "manager" or "overseer." Scholars speculate that it may refer to a Jewish officeholder. If so, this points to a well-developed Jewish community at Sepphoris at least as early as the Hasmonean period (141–37 B.C.E.).



Courtesy Sepphoris Regional Project

Several rather elegant stepped pools, or Jewish ritual baths (*mikva'ot*), are associated with this early Hasmonean phase. Although it was very surprising to find *mikva'ot* so early, an ostracon dated to this same period (late second century B.C.E.) indicates that Jews did indeed live at Sepphoris in the early Hasmonean period. The ostracon is inscribed in square Hebrew script.[7]

The first-century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus tells us in his history of the Jews that the governor of Cyprus attempted to conquer Sepphoris and take it from the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 B.C.E.), thereby confirming that it was under Hasmonean rule.[8]

Shortly after the Roman general Pompey conquered Syria-Palestine in 63 B.C.E., the Romans divided Jewish Palestine into five districts and established Jewish councils to administer local affairs in these districts. Sepphoris was selected as the only Galilean town to be assigned a Jewish council.[9]

In 37 B.C.E. the Hasmoneans were replaced by Herod the Great, although not without a struggle. Indeed, Sepphoris was a stronghold of the last Hasmonean king, Antigonus (c. 39–38 B.C.E.). Antigonus was supported by the Parthians (Persians), who had been instrumental in his appointment.

Herod captured the city, however, and made it his base of operations in the north.[10] He could well have used the old Seleucid fort as a kind of arsenal.

When Herod died in 4 B.C.E., a Galilean named Judas son of Ezekias led a rebellion directed at Sepphoris and its "royal" palace, or fort and arsenal.[11] The Roman legate of Syria, Varus, responded by burning the city to the ground and selling its rebellious inhabitants into slavery.[12]

The city seems to have recovered quickly, however. Perhaps Josephus exaggerated Varus's retaliatory attack. Already during the reign of Herod's son Herod Antipas (who fell heir to Galilee), the city expanded and its acropolis was rebuilt. Josephus describes this city as the "ornament of all Galilee." "Ornament" refers to more than beauty, however; the Greek word for ornament, *proschema*, also has a military connotation—fortification or impregnable city.[13] Sepphoris was the capital of Galilee until about 20 C.E., when Herod Antipas constructed a new city on the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, and shifted his capital there.

In 61 C.E., when the Roman emperor Nero turned Tiberias over to Herod Agrippa II, another descendant of Herod the Great, Sepphoris once again became the administrative center of Galilee.[14] Both the royal bank and the official archives were moved there.[15]

In 66 C.E. the First Jewish Revolt against Rome began. It effectively ended in 70 C.E. with the burning of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Sometimes called the Great Revolt, this uprising often conjures up visions of staunch resistance, symbolized by the Zealots' last stand at Masada or by the fierce defenders of Jerusalem during the Roman siege of the city in the spring and summer of 70 C.E. In truth, however, there was a very strong peace movement within the Jewish ranks, which included such luminaries as Yochanan ben Zakkai and, eventually, Josephus. As early as the time of Herod the Great, Hillel the Elder articulated a position of nonviolence and espoused a policy of working within the administrative structure of Roman rule.

Sepphoris, like Josephus, seems to have started out supporting the revolt but later thought better of it. (Unfortunately, our only source for these events is Josephus himself, and his reports are sometimes inconsistent.) Josephus served as commander of the Jewish force in the Galilee from 66 to 67 C.E. He was taken captive by the Romans at Jotapata, where he surrendered after the last of his companions committed suicide. After his capture, Josephus apparently experienced a profound change in his attitude toward Rome.

Similarly, Sepphoris residents were at first eager for hostilities against Rome.[16] Josephus himself was involved in fortifying Sepphoris. What may be the remains of a fortification wall from this period have recently been discovered by an archaeological expedition led by Zeev Weiss of Hebrew University. Sepphoris was "the strongest city in Galilee" according to Josephus.[17]

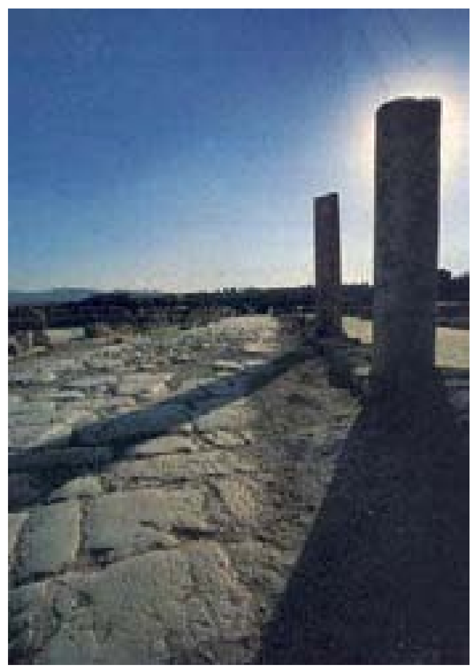
Nevertheless, at some point the city fathers appear to have changed their minds. Rather than risk destruction, the city chose the safer option—solidarity with the Romans. Early in the conflict, Sepphoris admitted a garrison of Roman soldiers,[18] which was later joined by another contingent from the Roman general and future emperor Vespasian.[19]

Josephus at first viewed the refusal of the city's inhabitants to participate in the revolt as a betrayal of their fellows.[20] But his own attitude changed after Sepphoris eagerly welcomed Vespasian and his army in peace.

Evidence that Sepphoris adopted a pro-Roman, or "peace," position comes from city coins minted there during the revolt. Some of these coins are inscribed "Under Vespasian, Eirenopolis [meaning "City of Peace"]—Neronias [in honor of Nero]—Sepphoris." The old fort, first used by the Seleucids and later by the Hasmoneans, and ultimately by Herod the Great, may have been filled in shortly before 68 C.E. and made into a great open plaza as a sign of Sepphoris's good will and change of heart toward the Romans.

We may now stop to consider the ethnic character of the city. Since we have been discussing the ancient literature, we may begin with Josephus. Aside from his report of the Roman soldiers who were garrisoned in Sepphoris during the revolt, Josephus nowhere refers to any gentile inhabitants of the city. Nor does he refer to any pagan temples or other Hellenistic institutions, such as a gymnasium, in the city. Indeed, nothing in his accounts suggests that Sepphoris in the first century C.E. was anything but a Jewish city. Later rabbinic traditions corroborate this image, preserving memories of the participation of priests from Sepphoris in the Temple cult in Jerusalem.[21]

Whether Jewish or gentile, however, it is clear that the city was no rural backwater. It was, at least architecturally, a sophisticated city with paved and colonnaded streets; water installations, possibly including a bathhouse on the eastern plateau and some sort of public water works nearer the acropolis; multistory buildings; and major public structures, including a large columned building also on the eastern plateau. A honeycomb of cisterns was cut into the bedrock underlying the city. The proximity of Sepphoris to Nazareth indeed undermines the notion that Jesus was unfamiliar with sophisticated urban culture; the question is whether that culture was predominantly Jewish or gentile.



Garo Nalbandian
The colonnaded *cardo*, the main north-south street of Sepphoris.

A number of archaeological considerations lead us to the same impression we get from Josephus—that Sepphoris was a Jewish city. This archaeological evidence will become even more persuasive when we contrast it with the materials from later periods.

The first bit of evidence comes from the faunal remains. Thousands upon thousands of fragments of animal bones have been recovered from the western summit of the site. These have been studied by Billy Grantham, associate professor of anthropology at Troy State University.[22] In the entire lot, there were so few pig bones from the Roman era that Grantham concluded that pork was a negligible component of the Sepphoreans' diet. This is especially significant because in the Byzantine era the percentage of pig bones rises to nearly 30 percent in Christian areas of the city. Clearly, the residents of the western summit avoided pig consumption, in keeping with Jewish dietary laws.

The second ethnic marker is already familiar to **BAR** readers.[c] In the residential area of the city, 114 fragments of stone vessels were recovered. Stone vessels are not subject to ritual impurity. When pottery vessels became ritually unclean they were destroyed. Metal and glass vessels could be repurified. But stone vessels did not become impure. Hence, large stone vessels were used to store pure water for ritual hand washing. (The Gospel of John 2:6 refers to "six stone jars [that] were standing for the Jewish rites of purification.") Bathhouse benches were made of stone for the same reason.[23]

Stone vessels have—and have *not*—been encountered in so many excavations that their presence may be used as an ethnic marker, as Yitzhak Magen, who has studied them extensively, has observed. The presence of more than a hundred stone vessel fragments in the residential area of Sepphoris is a strong indication that the inhabitants were Jewish.

The next ethnic marker is somewhat more controversial. There is no question that the presence of Jewish ritual baths, *mikva'ot*, indicates the presence of Jews. In our view, the many water pools found in the residential areas of Sepphoris from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods should be identified as *mikva'ot*. This has been challenged by Hanan Eshel, an Israeli scholar. The arguments on either side are aired elsewhere in this issue. Readers can decide for themselves the merits of the arguments, although in our view the outcome is clear. But even Eshel concedes that some of these pools may be *mikva'ot*. And there can be no doubt that where there are *mikva'ot* there are Jews.

Thus the lack of pig bones, the abundance of stone vessels and the presence, at least in our view, of many *mikva'ot* all support our conclusion that during Jesus' time Sepphoris was home to a significant Jewish community. This is entirely consistent with Josephus. This conclusion is also supported by the Hellenistic period Hebrew ostracon referred to earlier and by several late Roman period lamp fragments with menorahs (seven-branched candelabra) depicted on their central discus. In addition, numerous mosaic fragments with Hebrew and Aramaic letters have been recovered from the western summit of Sepphoris. All together, the evidence points to

a Jewish population in the Hellenistic-Roman period that maintained at least some of the most important religious laws of the Bible and the Mishnah.

The two types of coins minted by Sepphoris during the Great Revolt also suggest the city was primarily Jewish. Neither contains any image of the Roman emperor or pagan deities, although these images were common on coins of this period issued by cities on the Palestinian coast as well as by cities of the Decapolis (a group of ten cities mostly east of Galilee). On one of the Sepphoris coins is a double cornucopia (horn of plenty) with a staff in the middle. These were common symbols on first-century Jewish coins (the cornucopia, however, was by far the more common of the two). The other coin minted at Sepphoris during the revolt contains only an inscription, in Greek, with no image whatsoever.

In contrast to the abundant evidence of a Jewish presence in the city, evidence of a pagan presence in the first century C.E. is practically nonexistent. After more than 15 years of extensive excavations, no remains of a temple have been discovered, no cultic objects, no inscriptions referring to the worship of pagan deities. The typical architectural features of a Hellenistic city are also missing—we have discovered no gymnasium, no hippodrome (chariot-racing course), no amphitheater, no odeum (small, sometimes roofed theater), no nymphaeum (elaborately decorated fountain), no shrines and no statues.

We do not mean to suggest that Sepphoris was totally removed from the cultural trends of larger Roman society but only to demonstrate that the first-century city's Jewish character had by no means been submerged in a sea of Hellenism. While Sepphoris's economic, social and political influence in Galilee is clear; there is no reason to characterize the city as a center of Hellenism or as a typical Greco-Roman city in the first century.

Not until the second and third centuries C.E. do we find evidence of a non-Jewish presence at Sepphoris. But before examining this material, we must consider the very impressive theater that was first excavated at Sepphoris 70 years ago by Leroy Waterman of the University of Michigan. Renewed excavation by James F. Strange (University of South Florida) in 1983; by Eric Meyers (Duke University), Ehud Netzer (Hebrew University) and Carol Meyers (Duke University) in 1985; and by Ehud Netzer and Zeev Weiss (Hebrew University) in 1991 has unfortunately not entirely settled the question of the date of the theater. In our view, it was constructed some time near the end of the first century C.E., after the Great Revolt, or, more likely, early in the second century C.E. Several scholars have attempted to date the theater to a period before the Great Revolt. Some have even sought to associate the theater with Jesus. This dispute has already been aired in these pages.[d] Suffice it to say that few scholars have come forth in support of such an early dating.

As the city grew and expanded during the second century C.E., a new aqueduct system was constructed. This system served most of the needs of the city, as well as two public bathhouses in the lower city. An agora (marketplace) was probably also added.[24] Coins bearing

the bust of the emperor Trajan (98–117 C.E.) were minted by the city. Coins minted under Antoninus Pius (138–161 C.E.) not only bear the bust of the emperor but also display images of pagan deities—the Capitoline triad and Tyche, who is usually regarded as a city goddess.

The Antoninus Pius coins also reveal a new name for the city: Diocaesarea. This name, which honors both Zeus (in Latin, *Dio*) and the emperor, appears on all subsequent coins issued by the city and becomes the name by which the city is known in pagan and Christian literature.

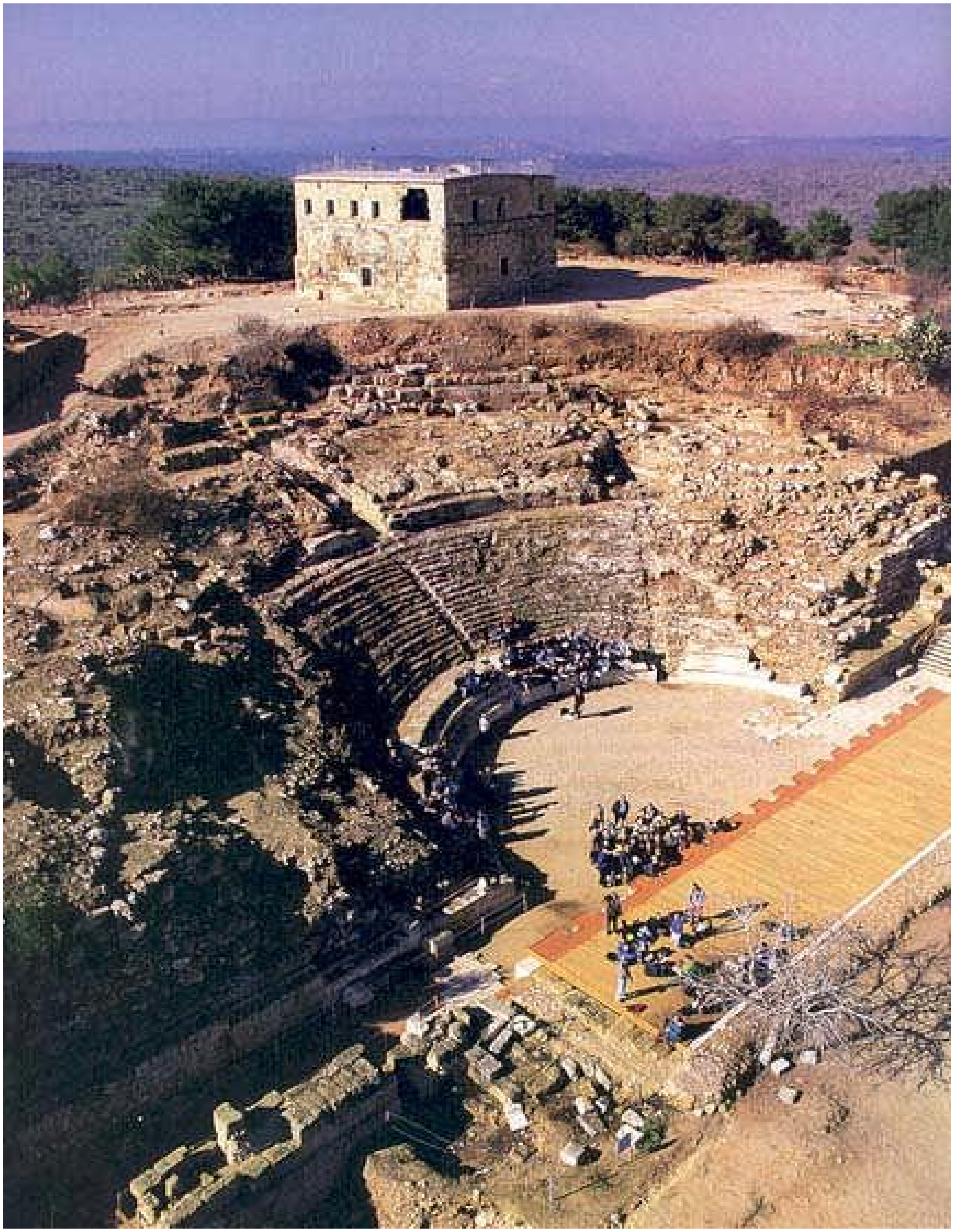
While a first-century C.E. coin minted at Sepphoris shows evidence of respect for Jewish sensibilities (see photograph), the coin shown here, minted at Sepphoris during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–161 C.E.), has all the characteristics of a pagan design. Not only does it bear the emperor's image, but the goddess Tyche is also depicted standing in a temple on the reverse side of the coin. Moreover, this later coin reveals a new Roman name for Sepphoris—Diocaesarea. By the mid-second century C.E., such signs of Greco-Roman influence were on the rise in Sepphoris. But as Chancey and Meyers point out, scholars should be careful about using this late evidence to prove anything about the city in the time of Jesus.



Israel Museum

Other post-first-century artifacts reflect growing Hellenistic and pagan influence. Second- and third-century lamps bear Hellenistic motifs, such as a medusa (from Greek mythology, a witch-like woman with snakes for hair). Other Sepphoris lamps from the period depict explicit erotic poses. A mid-second-century C.E. lead weight contains a Greek inscription identifying two of the city's market officials (*agoranomoi*), one with a Semitic name (Simon) and one with a Latin name (Justus).[25]

One of the most famous and most frequently visited discoveries at Sepphoris is a magnificent villa, situated on the acropolis near the theater, which dates to the early third century C.E. The floor is decorated with a beautifully preserved mosaic that contains an enigmatic portrait of an unknown woman often called the "Mona Lisa of the Galilee." More important for our purposes, however, are the panels in the center of the mosaic. Accompanied by explanatory Greek inscriptions, they depict a drinking contest between Dionysus, the god of wine, and Heracles, here depicted as a participant in a Greek-style symposium. Not surprisingly, Dionysus wins the contest. One panel shows Heracles drunk, and another features a procession in his honor.[26]



Duby Tal & Moni Haramati, Albatross

A 4,000-seat theater was first excavated at Sepphoris in 1931 and has been the subject of considerable academic debate ever since. Some scholars believe that Jesus himself may have sat on the theater's semicircular limestone benches. But Chancey and Meyers doubt that the theater was constructed before the end of the first century C.E. If Jesus did walk the streets of Sepphoris, he would have encountered a bustling city, but one that lacked many of the architectural hallmarks of a Hellenistic urban center.

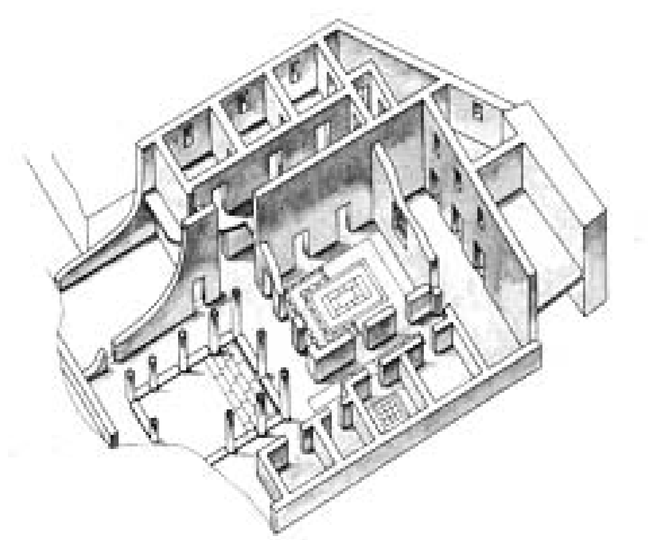


Eric Meyers/courtesy of the Joint Sepphoris Project

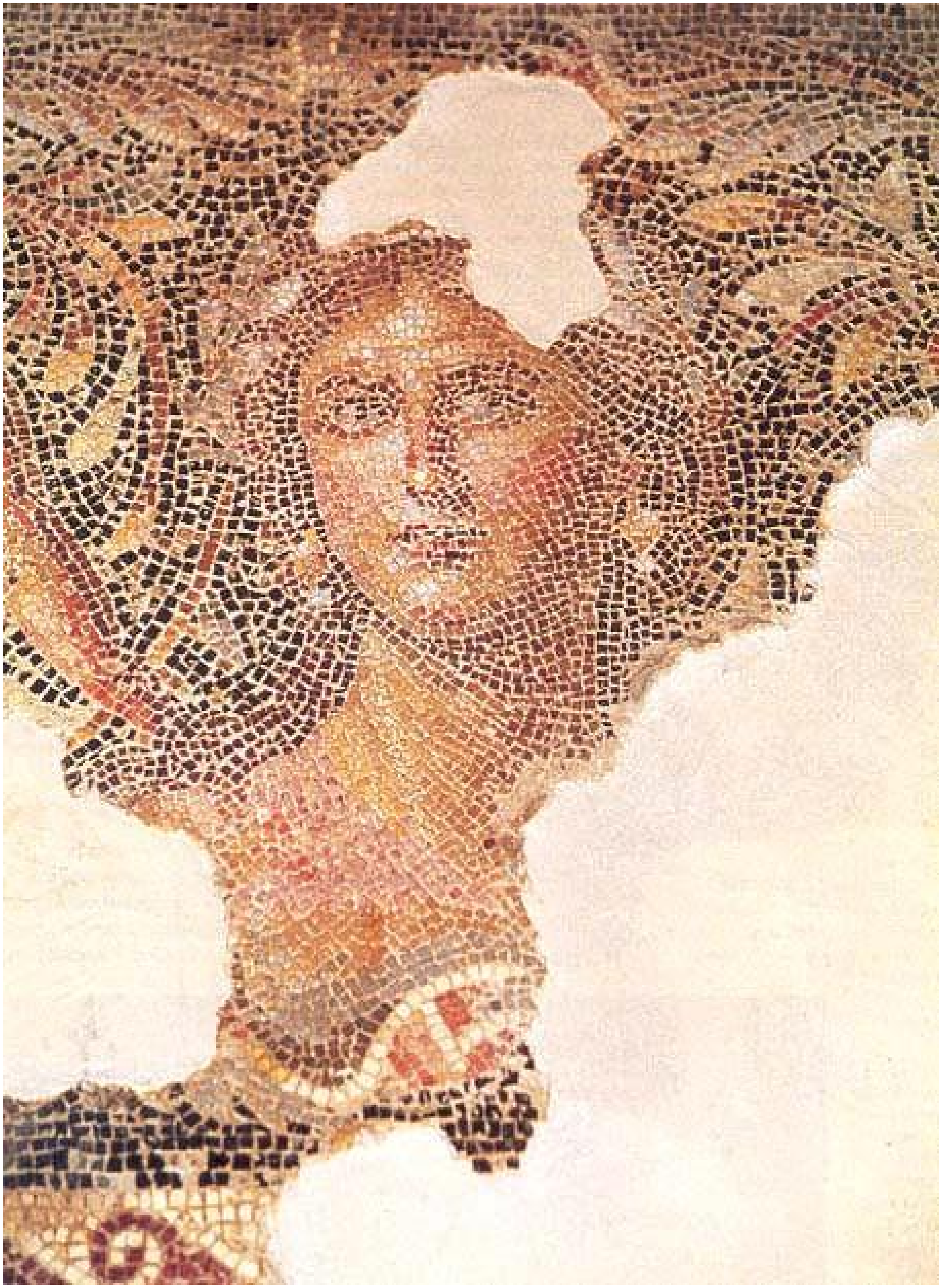
A magnificent villa, just south of the theater, offers striking evidence of the foreign cultural influences that left their mark on Sepphoris in the second, third and fourth centuries C.E. Contributing to the mix of cultures were the Roman troops headquartered just south of the city and the Jews who migrated to Galilee from southern Palestine during and after the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (132–135 C.E.). More hellenized than their Galilean counterparts, these southern Jews brought with them a greater familiarity with the language and customs of Greco-Roman civilization.

Dating to the third century C.E., the villa had a colorful mosaic floor in its *triclinium*, the banquet area/reception hall. Among its many well-preserved images, the mosaic features an exquisite portrait of a beautiful, but unknown, woman, often called the "Mona Lisa of the Galilee" (see photograph). The central portion of the mosaic contains 15 panels that depict episodes connected with Dionysus, the god of wine (see photographs).

Reconstruction drawing of the villa of the mosaics. The *triclinium* is in the center. See photograph above.



Courtesy Zeev Weiss



Duby Tal and Moni Haramati, Albatross

The "Mona Lisa of the Galilee." This exquisite mosaic of a beautiful, but unknown, woman was found in the *triclinium* of the villa.



Eric Meyers/courtesy of the Joint Sepphoris Project

One of the mosaic panels from the *triclinium* of the villa, depicting a drinking contest between Dionysus and the hero Heracles. A drunken Heracles, his club set aside, requires the assistance of two followers of Dionysus, a maenad and a satyr. Above the head of the satyr is the Greek word *methe* (drunkenness).



Courtesy Joint Sepphoris Project

One of the mosaic panels from the *triclinium* of the villa, showing Dionysus in a chariot, returning with his musical entourage from a triumphant trip to India.

But that is not all. Two tiny bronze figures—one depicting either Pan or a satyr, the other depicting Prometheus—were found in a cistern of a house on the western acropolis, and they, too, date to the second or third century C.E. A bronze bowl, a small bronze incense altar and a small bronze bull found together in a cistern and probably dating to the fourth century C.E. are most likely associated with the worship of Serapis.[27]

Sign of a growing pagan presence in Sepphoris, this bronze figurine dates to the second to third century C.E. Archaeologists uncovered it in a cistern beneath a house in the city's residential section. This bronze representation of a seated musician is probably a satyr. In Greek and Roman mythology, satyrs were associated with the cult of Dionysus and often, by extension, with conviviality and licentious behavior.



Courtesy Joint Sepphoris Project



Courtesy Joint Sepphoris Project

Sign of a growing pagan presence in Sepphoris, this bronze figurine dates to the second to third century C.E. Archaeologists uncovered it in a cistern beneath a house in the city's residential section. This figure shows Prometheus, who, in Greek mythology, incurred the wrath of Zeus by stealing fire from heaven and offering it as a gift to humans. For his theft, Prometheus suffered the punishment depicted here: Chained to a rock, he found himself at the mercy of a bird that perpetually tore away at his liver.

After the Great Revolt (66–70 C.E.), and especially after the Second Jewish Revolt (132–135 C.E.; sometimes called the Bar-Kokhba Revolt), Jews from southern Palestine migrated north to Galilee, bringing with them the Hellenistic culture that had previously been more pronounced at Jerusalem and its environs than in Galilee. The hellenization of Galilee was also significantly increased by the arrival of Roman troops, who, in 120 C.E., were for the first time permanently stationed there. The VI Ferrata Legion and their support personnel were headquartered at Legio, only a few miles south of Sepphoris. But all this occurred well after the time of Jesus.

By the fourth century C.E., Greek inscriptions are common at Sepphoris. The name of the city had already been changed to Diocaesarea, perhaps to placate the nearby Romans, and the city administration may well have been composed of a mixture of gentiles (pagans as well as Christians) and Jews.

While the growing visibility of Greco-Roman culture at Sepphoris is unmistakable, evidence of pagan worship is still scant. Despite images of temples on second- and third-century C.E. city coins, no actual temple has yet been discovered at Sepphoris. And while the figurines and other cultic objects mentioned above provide glimpses of pagan practices, they are few in number and late in date.

Moreover, the evidence for Judaism in Sepphoris only grows after the first century C.E. The most obvious evidence is the prominence of Sepphoris in rabbinic sources. Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, or Judah the Prince, apparently supervised the codification of Jewish law in the Mishnah at Sepphoris. *Mikva'ot* dating as late as the fourth century C.E. are common. Few pig bones are found before the Byzantine period (fourth century C.E.). Two fourth-century C.E. lamps from Sepphoris depict a menorah; another shows an *aedicula* resembling a Torah shrine.[28] The fourth-century bishop Epiphanius records an application by a Christian to build churches in Sepphoris; Emperor Constantine's reply refers to "the cities and villages of the Jews … where there is not among them a pagan or a Samaritan or a Christian." It then mentions four cities in which "no gentile can be found among them": Nazareth, Capernaum, Tiberias—and Diocaesarea, that is, Sepphoris.[29]

It is against this background that we must consider Sepphoris as it may be relevant to the search for the historical Jesus.

Unfortunately, some scholars have misperceived Sepphoris as a center of Greco-Roman culture in the time of Jesus on the basis of finds from the centuries after Jesus. Sepphoris was indeed a thriving and growing city in the early first century C.E., but the evidence for Hellenistic culture is limited. As for the city's population, the overwhelming majority were Jews. Gentiles, if they were present at all, were a small and uninfluential minority.

Some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that the cultural trends in Galilee in Jesus' time differed little from those elsewhere in the Roman Empire. On this basis, they view Jesus as a kind of sage influenced by popular—that is, less scholarly—versions of Greek and Roman philosophy. Popular philosophers could be found throughout the urban centers of the Roman Empire, standing on street corners haranguing passersby with their views, so why not in Sepphoris? So the argument runs. These scholars, incorrectly in our view, reject the notion that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet proclaiming the end of the present age and the arrival of a new age where God's rule would be accomplished on earth—the traditional Jewish understanding of the "kingdom of God" that he preached.

John Dominic Crossan, for example, has painted a picture of Jesus espousing an eastern Mediterranean version of a Greek philosophy known as Cynicism. According to scholars like Crossan, Jesus the peasant Cynic traveled throughout Galilee calling for a countercultural rejection of social norms. His followers were to abandon their possessions, "storing up treasures in heaven" instead (Matthew 6:19).

If the apocalyptic understanding of this kingdom is rejected, then what did Jesus mean by the "kingdom of God"? According to Crossan, Jesus, advocating Cynic-like values, wanted to bring about, not an apocalyptic kingdom, but a kingdom in which social barriers were eliminated and society's outcasts and rejects were elevated.

In fact, however, there is no evidence for the presence of philosophic teachers, Cynic or otherwise, in first-century C.E. Galilee. While the influence of Hellenistic culture was growing in Galilee, it did not reach its apex until the following centuries. Sepphoris was a primarily Jewish city, and nothing suggests that Greco-Roman philosophers would have been found there.

In a book entitled *Jesus and the Forgotten City*, Richard Batey even tries to make a case that Sepphoris was a booming Hellenistic city early in the first century C.E. He posits a Sepphoris with many gentiles practicing pagan rituals, and a pagan culture that had a far-reaching effect on the indigenous people of the region, including nearby Nazarenes such as Jesus. Although most of Batey's views have been rejected, his assumption that the Lower Galilee was fully hellenized in the time of Jesus has been shared by many scholars. As a result, many scholars are looking for Hellenism as an influence on Jesus' teaching, rather than looking for its source in Jewish culture. Although some aspects of Jewish culture were fully at home in Hellenistic culture, it nevertheless remains the case that Hebrew language and literature, as well as Aramaic and Jewish culture, dominated the region at this time. And it is there that we must search for the historical Jesus.

Spotlight on Sepphoris

Sepphoris in Ancient History

Sidebar to: How Jewish Was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?

Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.E.)

According to a rabbinic text (Mishnah, *Arakin* 9.6), Zippori (the Hebrew name for Sepphoris) was one of the cities fortified by Joshua during the conquest of Canaan. Excavations have not revealed a city from this period, however.

539 B.C.E.

Persian ruler Cyrus the Great conquers Babylon and allows the exiled Jews to return from their Babylonian captivity. Sepphoris may have been the site of a Persian garrison during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.

200 B.C.E.

Seleucid ruler Antiochus III conquers Jerusalem. Sepphoris becomes the site of a Seleucid fort constructed by either Antiochus III or his successor, Antiochus IV. The fort bolsters the city's reputation as a key stronghold in Galilee.

167 B.C.E.

Under the leadership of Judah Maccabee, the Jews mount a rebellion against the Seleucids, which culminates in the establishment of the Hasmonean dynasty in Judea. Archaeological evidence indicates the presence of a Jewish community at Sepphoris during the Hasmonean period.

63 B.C.E.

The Roman general Pompey conquers Syria-Palestine, but Sepphoris survives as a Hasmonean stronghold.

37 B.C.E.

The Romans appoint Herod ruler of Judea; he captures Sepphoris from Antigonus, the last Hasmonean king.

4 B.C.E.

Herod dies. At Sepphoris, Judas son of Ezekias leads a brief insurrection against Rome. The empire responds by burning Sepphoris and enslaving the rebels.

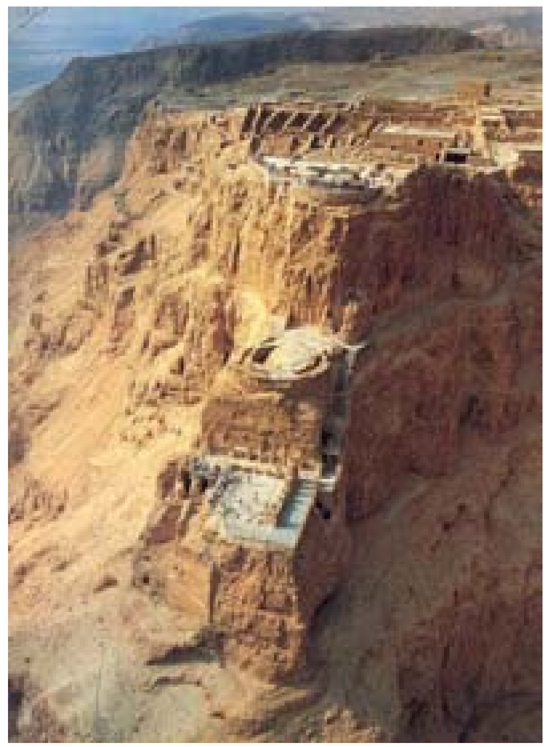
66–70 C.E.
The First Jewish Revolt against Rome (the Great Revolt). The inhabitants of Sepphoris adopt a pacifist position and welcome a Roman garrison into their city.
132–135 C.E.
The unsuccessful Second Jewish Revolt against Rome (the Bar-Kokhba Revolt) leads to mass migrations from southern Palestine into Galilee. The population shift brings an increased Hellenistic influence to Sepphoris.
138–161 C.E.
The Roman emperor Antoninus Pius reigns. Coins minted during his rule reveal a new Roman name for Sepphoris—Diocaesarea.
Third and Fourth Centuries C.E.
Greco-Roman influences become more widespread in Sepphoris. But the city is also a key rabbinic center, with numerous synagogues and Jewish ritual baths. A fourth-century message from Emperor Constantine, recorded by Epiphanius, indicates that Sepphoris remains a very Jewish city.

Where Masada's Defenders Fell

A garbled passage in Josephus has obscured the location of the mass suicide

By Nachman Ben-Yehuda

Prior to Yigael Yadin's excavations in the 1960s, most of what we knew about Herod the Great's mountain fortress of Masada came from the first-century C.E. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. The story is well known: After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Temple in 70 C.E., the First Jewish Revolt against Rome was, for all practical purposes, suppressed. However, three fortresses in the Judean wilderness remained outside Roman control: Herodium, Machaerus and Masada. It took the Roman military machine a number of years to attend to these remnants of the revolt. Masada, occupied by 967 Jewish rebels, was the last fortress the Romans attacked.

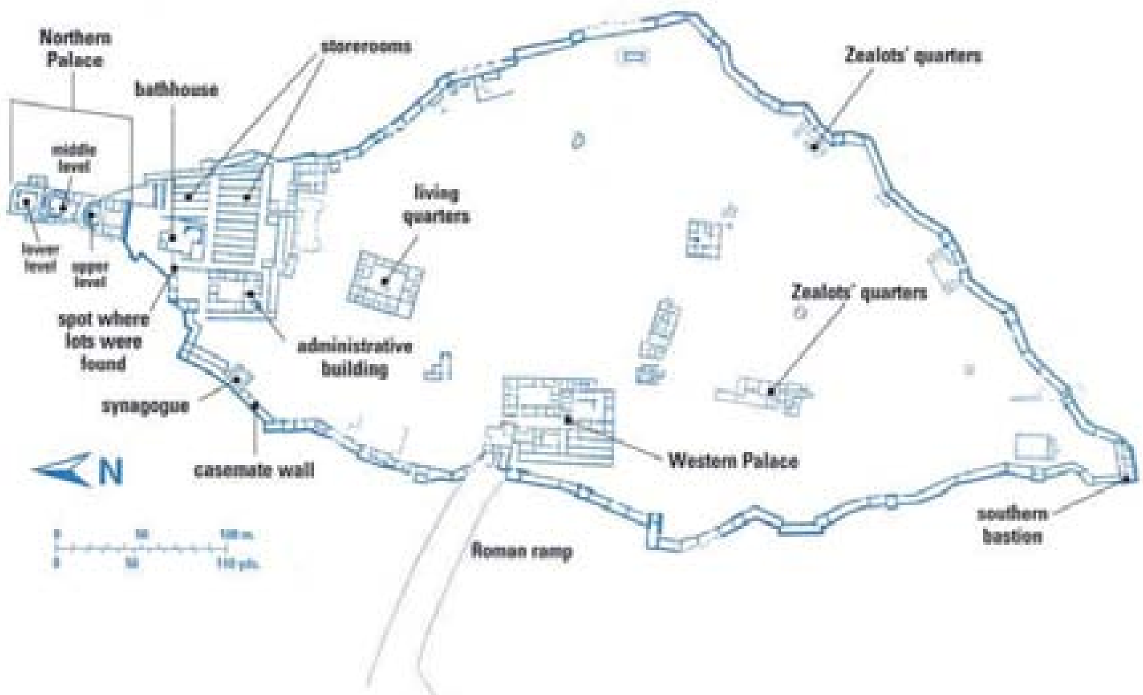


Duby Tal/Albatross

They built numerous camps around the site, amassed thousands of troops, besieged it for three to four years, and, finally, built a ramp and stormed the fortress proper. Yet when the Romans, led by Silva, breached Masada's walls, they encountered only silence: 960 of the Jews had committed suicide rather than surrender to their enemies.

Yadin's excavations confirmed this account in its broad outlines, but many today question the details given in Josephus's account and seemingly corroborated by Yadin's interpretation of the finds. Did the Jews really commit mass suicide? Did the Jewish commander Eleazar Ben Yair actually make the stirring speeches Josephus attributes to him (see "Let Us Leave This World As Free Men")? Did Yadin really find the lots the Jewish defenders used to select the ten men who

would slay everyone else and the one among the ten who would slay the other nine and then himself? Were there really 960 rebels? What happened to the bodies? Did Yadin find some of them, as he claimed (see Whose Bones?)?



Plan of Masada.

I studied Josephus's account for many years while preparing a book on the episode and its use in modern Israel.[1] One sentence of it has always puzzled me. It has led me to think more deeply about what might have happened to the corpses of the Jews. Whether the Jews committed mass suicide or were killed by the Romans, their bodies, I reasoned, had to have been disposed of in some way. This realization led me, in turn, to consider precisely where the mass suicide of the Jews may have occurred. But I am getting ahead of the story.

The sentence from Josephus that has given me so much trouble concerns a palace Herod built at Masada: "He [Herod] built a palace therein at the western ascent; it was within and beneath the walls of the citadel, but inclined to its north side."[2] A problem arises here because there are two palaces at Masada, a western palace and a northern palace.

The western palace is the largest structure on the site. It occupies an area of about 36,000 square feet near the point where the western ascent to Masada—the geological formation on which the Romans built their siege ramp—meets the top of the mountain.

The northern palace is the most dramatic and elegant structure on the site. With three levels, it is more a villa than a palace. Its lowest level was supported by huge external walls and columns chiseled into the rock. It had frescoes and a small bath house. The middle level had a

small circular structure whose purpose is not entirely clear. The top level contained living quarters and a semicircular veranda that still provides a spectacular view.

To which of these palaces was Josephus referring? For many years, scholars thought Josephus meant the western palace since it is located near the western ascent on which the Romans built their ramp. However, this conclusion does not fit the rest of Josephus's description. The western palace, as Yadin found it, is not "beneath the walls of the citadel" and is certainly not "inclined to its [the site's] north side."



Baron Wolman

Its audacious setting at the very tip of Masada makes the northern palace (lower left) the site's most spectacular feature. But was it the location of the mass suicide? The sentence in Josephus on which that question hangs refers to a palace Herod built "at the western ascent … within and beneath the walls of the citadel, but inclined to its north side." The northern palace fits much of this description. Two of its three levels lie dramatically beneath the citadel walls, while its top level lies within the walls. However, the northern palace is not near the western ascent (right of center), on which the Romans built a siege ramp.

For these reasons, Yadin and others concluded that Josephus must have been referring to the northern palace in this passage. The northern palace lay "beneath the walls of the citadel" and was "inclined to its north side." Moreover, Josephus mentioned "a road dug from the palace, and leading to the very top of the mountain." This too seems to indicate the northern palace. There is a problem, however: No western ascent leads to the northern palace. If Josephus's description is accurate, it cannot refer to this palace either. From all this, we can draw only one conclusion: Josephus's sentence simply does not make sense as it stands.

Nor does it make sense that Josephus never seems to mention the western palace at all. Josephus, who is well known for his accurate descriptions, appears to have been quite familiar with Masada. Are we to believe that he simply failed to make any reference to the largest building on the site? This would be especially surprising since the Roman breach of Masada's wall occurred near this structure.

I believe this sentence from Josephus has been corrupted. Something has been changed or omitted. The words that give this away are "a palace … at the western ascent." This can only be the western palace. Yet the rest of the sentence can only refer to the northern palace. Some text must have been lost in the middle.

I believe that the text stating "He built a palace therein at the western ascent" was originally followed by a description of the western palace and, after that, a description of the northern palace. At some point, the description of the western palace was deleted and the two unrelated sentences were combined, creating an ambiguous text that cannot be parsed.

The various versions of Josephus that survive in manuscript form provide little help in reconstructing this sentence. The standard Greek version with commentary uses the word for "palace," *basileion* (literally "place of the king"), in the first part of the sentence, and the word *akra*, which might indicate a kind of citadel, in the second part of the sentence.[3] This use of two different words seems to confirm that the two parts of the sentence refer to two different palaces.

The Greek version of Josephus is based on two principal manuscript groups dating from the 10th to the 12th century. Both textual groups existed as early as the third century. Early translations from the Greek into Latin (fourth and fifth centuries) and Syriac (sixth century) also exist. The omission in this sentence, however, occurs in those texts as well. In short, none of the surviving manuscripts offers a significant alternative reading for this passage.

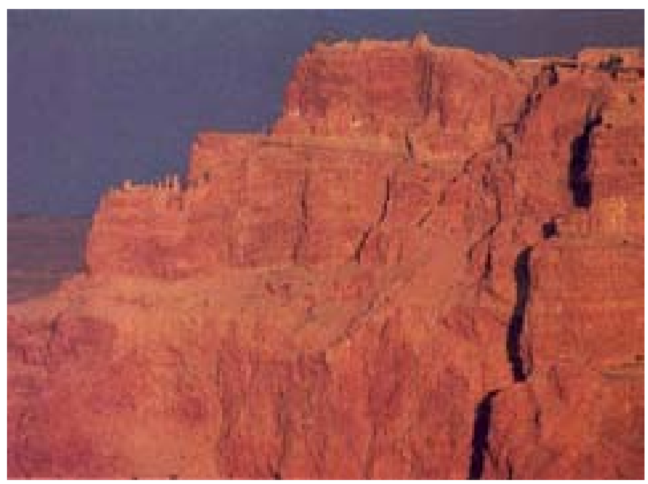
In 1923 and 1993, Josephus was published in Hebrew translations. Both of these editions incorrectly translate "ascent" (the Greek *anabasis*) as "*descent*." If Josephus had said that Herod built himself a palace "in the western descent," then, with a little imagination, we might take this as a reference to the northern palace—as if there were a "western descent" leading to it. This is clearly wrong. Apparently, the translators were attempting to make some sense of this critical sentence.

Omissions such as the one in this sentence occur accidentally all the time. Sometimes, however, they are intentional. In this case, someone may have wanted readers (contemporary and future) to be unaware of something. But of what? What about the western palace would be worthy of omission? That it was where the Jewish commander Eleazar addressed his people, where the mass suicide occurred and where the Roman soldiers buried the bodies? That is the proposition I would like to explore.

When the final male survivor "perceived that they all were slain," Josephus tells us, "he set fire to the palace, and with the great force of his hand ran his sword entirely through himself,

and fell down dead near to his own relations.” (According to Josephus, a few children and two old women hid themselves and lived to tell the tale.) The implication of this passage is that the collective suicide took place at “the palace.”

Which palace is Josephus referring to? It seems clear that he means the western palace. The lower and middle levels of the northern palace would not have held 960 people. It also would have been hard to assemble everyone on one of the palace levels because the path down to them is difficult to traverse. The western palace, on the other hand, was easily accessible and could have accommodated everyone; it would have been a natural place for the collective suicide. Indeed, even Yadin noted that the western palace was probably the central locale for Masada’s ceremonies and its administration. Also, when Yadin excavated the western palace, he found it had been terribly burnt, which would be in keeping with Josephus’s account.[a] Furthermore, the word Josephus uses in this sentence for palace is *basileion*, the same word he used earlier for the palace “at the western ascent,” not *akra*, the word he used for the palace “beneath the walls.” His very terminology points to the western palace as the place of the suicide and fire.



Richard Nowitz

Profile in courage? The northern palace’s three levels jut dramatically from Masada’s northern tip. But the very feature that makes the palace the most striking structure on Masada argues against it being the site of the defenders suicide: Where would 960 people have been able to fit in it? Josephus describes a large final assembly at which Masada’s leader, Eleazar Ben Yair, made an impassioned speech that convinced almost all of the defenders to commit suicide (a few elderly women and some children chose to hide in Masada’s caves instead).

The semicircular veranda of the northern palace’s upper level, the circular structure of its middle level and the lowest terrace are simply too small to have accommodated a group of that size. Plus it would have been difficult for them all to climb down to the palace; the path is narrow and steep. No, writes author Ben-Yehuda, the site of the suicide must be elsewhere on the mountaintop.

When the Roman soldiers, probably in full armor, finally broke open the gateway to Masada at the top of the ramp, they entered carefully, expecting to meet resistance. Instead they were greeted only by the sounds, sights and smell of fire. The rebels were dead. The Roman soldiers “attempted to put the fire out, and quickly cutting … a way through it … came within the

palace, and so met with the multitude of the slain, but could take no pleasure in the fact, though it were done to their enemies." In Josephus's narrative, the Romans do not take long to go through the fire, debris and rubble of the *basileion*. This also implies that the bodies were discovered in the western palace. Heading north and searching the northern palace would have taken longer; the western palace was near the Romans' point of entry.

Josephus's failure to mention the western palace, so central to the entire action, is mysterious. Could someone have tampered with the text to omit whatever description Josephus gave of it? And if so, why?

One plausible answer has to do with the missing bodies. Yadin thought that he had found the skeletons of a few of the slain defenders in a cave on Masada's southeastern face, but this is open to serious question (see Whose Bones?). In any event, he found fewer than 30 skeletons. So what happened to the rest?

The Romans occupied Masada for nearly 40 years after conquering it; they could not have simply left the dead to rot where they had fallen. They could have thrown the bodies of the slain over the side of the cliff, but I doubt it. I don't believe the Romans would have wanted to see those bodies at the bottom of the cliff, rotting in the sun and being eaten by animals. Not only would it have been unpleasant and unhealthy, but the Romans apparently had a grudging but understandable respect for their erstwhile enemies. According to Josephus, "Nor could they [the Roman soldiers] do other than wonder at the courage of their [the Jewish rebels'] resolution, and at the immovable contempt of death which so great a number of them had shown, when they went through with such an action." [4]

The Romans could have set fire to the bodies, but burning 960 would have been a major undertaking requiring materials hardly available in the desert. They could have buried the bodies in a mass grave, especially if, as indicated above, the Romans had some respect for the dead. But where would they have dug this grave? At the foot of the Roman ramp? Somewhere on Masada's top? The latter seems more logical. It would have got the bodies out of the way quickly and respectfully. My guess—and it is just a guess—is that the bodies were buried in or close to the western palace, where the Romans had found them.

In the Byzantine period, between the fifth and seventh centuries, monks lived on Masada and built a church northeast of the western palace. Monks usually built their churches and monasteries on sites that had some historical and transcendental significance. Did they come to Masada to build a church where they knew, or guessed, the death scene of Masada had occurred—and perhaps where the bodies were buried?



Ehud Netzer/Israel Exploration Society/Masada Excavations

The western palace, with 36,000 square feet, was Masada's largest structure and probably served as the administrative center of the site. It was easily accessible, located near the western ascent and could have held 960 people. Further, it sits near the top of the ramp (visible leading up to the palace in the first photo of the article) the Romans would have used for their final assault, making it likely that the defenders would have massed here.

However, though the western palace meets the practical requirements of the mass suicide, it does not fully match Josephus's description of the Masada site: It did not lie outside the citadel's walls or on the northern side of Masada. How can these difficulties be reconciled?

Author Nachman Ben-Yehuda suggests the problem lies in Josephus's description, not in the site; part of the problematic sentence describes the northern palace and part of it describes the western palace. Ben-Yehuda argues that a section of Josephus's original account was omitted relatively soon after it was written either by accident or by people who wanted to obscure the location of the suicide.

Finally, did the early Christians delete the information provided in Josephus's original passage because they did not want later generations of Jews (and others) to make the site a place for Jewish pilgrimage or veneration?

Speculative? Yes. Impossible? No.

I am grateful to Shmuel Gertel for his crucial and significant help in translating original writings and locating sources.

Questioning Masada

"Let Us Leave This World as Free Men"

Sidebar to: Where Masada's Defenders Fell

Ben Yair's Last Speech According to Josephus

When the besieged Jewish defenders of Masada saw that the Romans had completed a ramp up to their walls and were preparing to attack in the morning, they realized that their long struggle would soon be over. They knew no one could rescue them; they were the last holdout of the Jewish resistance that had fought Rome in the First Jewish Revolt (66–70 A.D.). Jerusalem had fallen in 70 A.D., and the Temple had been destroyed. All other pockets of resistance had been crushed one by one and the captured rebels tortured and killed, enslaved or sent to Rome to die as gladiators.

Masada's defenders assembled for the last time. According to the first-century A.D. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, their leader, Eleazar Ben Yair, addressed them with so moving a speech that 960 of the 967 Masada defenders were convinced to commit suicide and die as free persons rather than face torment, slaughter, rape and enslavement at the hands of the Romans. The defenders cast lots, Josephus writes: Ten men would kill the others and then draw lots again to determine which one would kill the other nine before killing himself. Yigael Yadin, Masada's excavator, believed the inscribed lots he had found (photo at center) were the ones described by Josephus.

Josephus claimed that seven people slipped out of Masada just before its fall, avoiding both suicide and capture by the Romans. Josephus, who was not an eyewitness, claims that one of those survivors told him of Ben Yair's speech. However, some scholars question Josephus's account, claiming that Ben Yair never made the speech, that no mass suicide occurred and that Masada's excavator, Yigael Yadin, claimed too quickly that the archaeological evidence fit

Josephus's account. Though archaeological evidence at other sites has been found to verify Josephus's accounts in great detail, scholars point out that the most important evidence of all is missing from Masada—the remains of the 960. Whatever its veracity, Ben Yair's speech undoubtedly still has the power to stir emotions nearly 2,000 years later: "My loyal followers, long ago we resolved to serve neither the Romans nor anyone else but only God, who alone is the true and righteous Lord of men: now the time has come that bids us prove our determination by our deeds. At such a time we must not disgrace ourselves: hitherto we have never submitted to slavery, even when it brought no danger with it. We must not choose slavery now, and with it penalties that will mean the end of everything if we fall alive into the hands of the Romans. For we were the first of all to revolt, and shall be the last to break off the struggle. And I think it is God who has given us this privilege, which we can die nobly and as free men, unlike others who were unexpectedly defeated. In our case it is evident that daybreak will end our resistance, but we are free to choose an honorable death with our loved ones. This our enemies cannot prevent, however earnestly they may pray to neither take us alive; nor can we defeat them in battle …

"Let our wives die unabused, our children without knowledge of slavery: after that, let us do each other an ungrudging kindness, preserving our freedom as a glorious winding-sheet. But first let our possessions and the whole fortress go up in flames: it will be a bitter blow to the Romans, which I know, to find our persons beyond their reach and nothing left for them to loot. One thing let us spare—our store of food: it will bear witness when we are dead to the fact that we perished, not through want but because, as we resolved at the beginning, we chose death rather than slavery …

"If only we had all died before seeing the Sacred City utterly destroyed by enemy hands, the Holy Sanctuary so impiously uprooted! But since an honorable ambition deluded us into thinking that perhaps we should succeed in avenging her of her enemies, and now all hope has fled, abandoning us to our fate, let us at once choose death with honor and do the kindest thing we can for ourselves, our wives and children, while it is still possible to show ourselves any kindness. After all, we were born to die, we and those we brought into the world: this even the luckiest must face. But outrage, slavery, and the sight of our wives led away to shame with our children—these are not evils to which man is subject by the laws of nature: men undergo them through their own cowardice if they have a chance to forestall them by death and will not take it. We are very proud of our courage, so we revolted from Rome: now in the final stages they have offered to spare our lives and we have turned the offer down. Is anyone too blind to see how furious they will be if they take us alive? Pity the young whose bodies are strong enough to survive prolonged torture; pity the not-so-young whose old frames would break under such ill-usage. A man will see his wife violently carried off; he will hear the voice of his child crying 'Daddy!' when his own hands are fettered.

Come! While our hands are free and can hold a sword, let them do a noble service! Let us die unenslaved by our enemies, and leave this world in company with our wives and children."

Flavius Josephus, Jewish War 7.8.6–7

A New Reconstruction of Paul's Prison

Herod's Antonia fortress

By Ehud Netzer

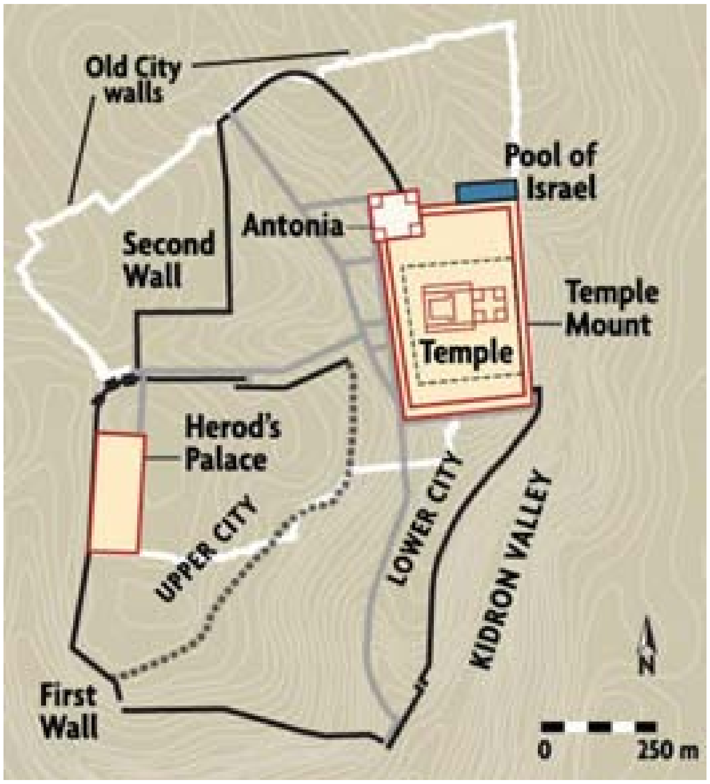
The Antonia, the palace/fortress lavishly described by the ancient Jewish historian Josephus at the northwest corner of the Herodian Temple Mount, is not mentioned by name in the New Testament. For a long time, however, it was thought to be the "praetorium" where Pilate questioned Jesus and found him innocent.

The praetorium is also mentioned in Mark 15:15–16, where Pilate, to satisfy the crowd, delivers Jesus to be crucified, and the soldiers lead him away, taking him "inside the palace (that is, the praetorium)." And in Matthew 27:27, the soldiers take Jesus into the "praetorium," where he is mocked and hailed as King of the Jews.

A praetorium was originally the residence of a praetor—a provincial governor. These New Testament references make it clear that the praetorium they are referring to is part of a palace that is a royal residence. Herod's palace was not near the Temple Mount. Scholars are generally agreed that it lay on the western edge of the city, south of today's Jaffa Gate. It no doubt stood just as Herod built it until the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Josephus describes the layout in his account of the First Jewish Revolt against the Romans. It would be—and was—an ideal and honorable place to house the supreme Roman authority. A similar phenomenon is known to us from Caesarea, where Herod's Promontory Palace later became a praetorium. In short, the praetorium was most likely located in Herod's palace—not the Antonia—and there is thus no New Testament reference to Jesus in connection with the Antonia.

With Paul, however, it is different. When Paul was arrested at the Temple, he was bound in chains and taken to the "barracks," which was entered via "steps" (Acts 21:34–35). He was later incarcerated in the "barracks" (Acts 21:37). A very good case can be made that the "barracks" referred to was part of the Antonia at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount.

Attacks on the Temple Mount (and Jerusalem) have traditionally come from the north. Steep valleys lie to the east and west. To the south, the terrain descends more gradually but just as deeply through the City of David, the earliest settlement of Jerusalem.



Herod's Jerusalem. Herod's building projects did more to change the face of Jerusalem than those of any other ruler in the city's history. In addition to constructing the Antonia, renovating the Temple and expanding the Temple Mount platform, Herod built a grand palace in the upper city on Jerusalem's western ridge. It is likely that here in the palace, or praetorium—rather than in the Antonia—Jesus was tried and condemned by Pilate.

Before the Antonia was constructed at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, earlier Jewish rulers (the Hasmoneans) had also erected a citadel here called the Baris. Herod replaced the Baris with his own palace/fortress, not only to protect against invaders, but to control whatever was happening on the Temple Mount. Herod named the grand palace/fortress after his protector and friend Marc Antony. (Naming it for Marc Antony tells us that the Antonia was built before 31 B.C.E., when Antony was defeated by Octavian at the Battle of Actium.)

Josephus describes the Antonia in some detail: With a tower at each of its four corners, the Antonia was apparently square or nearly so. Three of the towers were 50 cubits high; the fourth, on the southeast corner, was 70 cubits high. (Although the precise length of a cubit is a matter of scholarly debate, it is about 50 cm [18–20 in]).

Josephus also tells us that "A Roman cohort was permanently quartered there." This sounds a lot like the "barracks" referred to in Acts. Moreover, the Antonia was connected by stairs to the Temple Mount, and Acts tells us that the "barracks" were entered by "steps." So the connection of the Antonia with Paul's incarceration seems quite secure. But what was the Antonia like?

Unfortunately, practically nothing remains of the structure. What we have are mainly cuts in the bedrock at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. While these have raised many questions, no scholar has ever seriously questioned the existence of this palatial fortress at this site.



What's in a Namesake? The very name of the Antonia gives us important information about its construction. Herod named the fortress after his Roman friend and protector Marc Antony (left), who was engaged in a power struggle with Octavian (later named Augustus). When Octavian defeated Antony and his lover Cleopatra at the naval Battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E., he took sole control of the Roman Empire. Herod quickly and strategically switched his allegiance to the victorious Octavian. The fact that the Antonia is so-named indicates that it was built before 31 B.C.E. It was apparently his first building project.

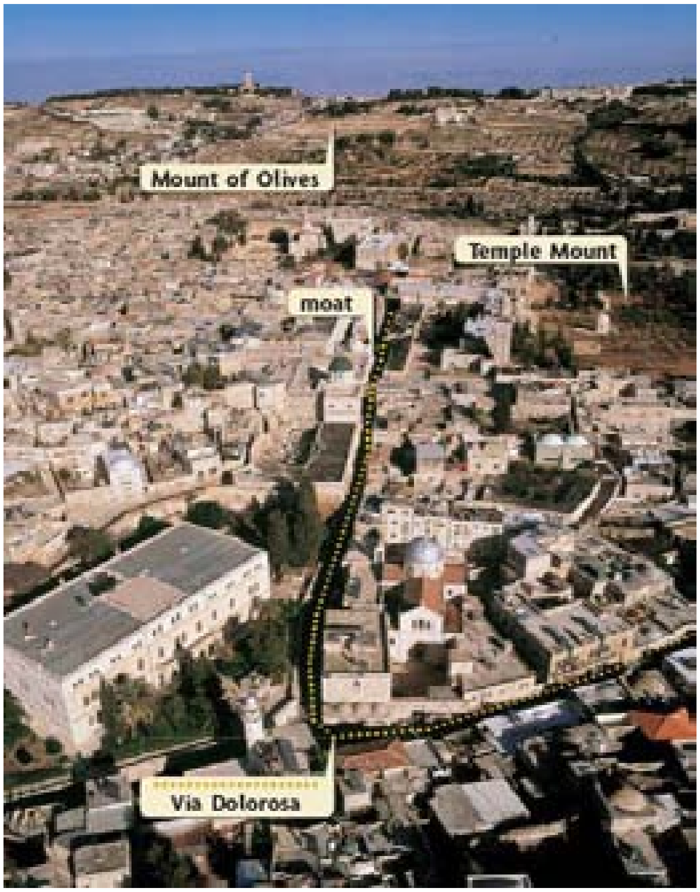
The Art Archive/Museo Capitolino Rome/Gianni Dagli Orti

Josephus tells us the Antonia was set on a height: It was built "on a rock fifty cubits high, and all sides precipitous ... This rock was covered from its base upwards with smooth flagstones, both for ornament and in order that anyone attempting to ascend or descend it might slip off."

At the top of the rock was a wall 3 cubits high, behind which was the "majestic" edifice. It "resembled a palace in its spaciousness and appointments, being divided into apartments of every description and for every purpose, including cloisters, baths and broad courtyards for the accommodation of troops; so that from its possession of all conveniences it seemed a town; from its magnificence, a palace."

Josephus goes on:

"At the point where it impinged upon the porticoes of the Temple, there were stairs leading down to both of them, by which the guards descended; for a Roman cohort was permanently quartered there, and at the festivals took up positions in arms around the porticoes to watch the people and repress any insurrectionary movement. For if the Temple lay as a fortress over the city, the Antonia dominated the Temple, and the occupants of that post were the guards of all three; the upper town had its own fortress—Herod's palace."



Cutting through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, the Via Dolorosa makes its way west—down the center of this photo looking east—from the Temple Mount (the northern edge of which is visible at upper right) before cutting back to the southeast. This path, walked by Christians to follow the Stations of the Cross and other traditional sites associated with Jesus' passion and death, begins at the former site of the Antonia, where it was once believed Jesus was tried and condemned by Pontius Pilate. Although it is unlikely that Jesus' trial took place here, the first portion of this pilgrimage route overlies another important ancient feature: the east-west moat that marked the northern boundary of the Antonia. The Mount of Olives can be seen in the background.

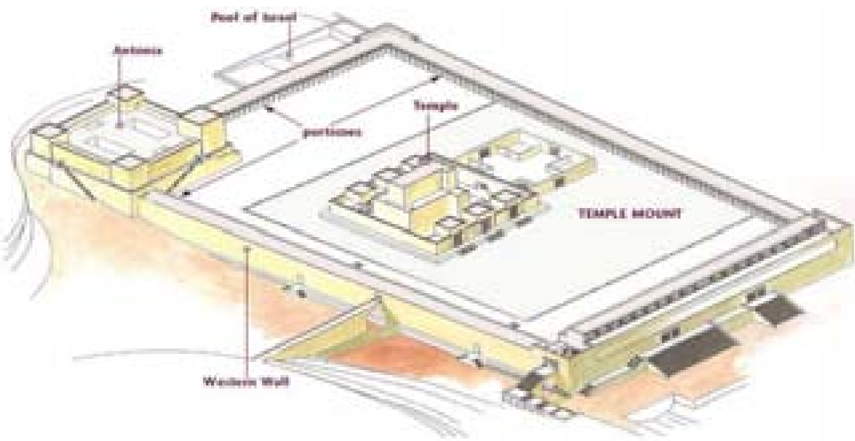
Duby Tal/Albatross

All in all, according to Josephus the Antonia was "a crowning exhibition of the innate grandeur of [Herod's] genius." The Antonia was apparently Herod's first building project. He did not begin the renovation and expansion of the Temple and its enclosure until around 20 B.C.E.

With no archaeological remains, however, we are left with only some rock cuttings to learn more. The most important is the remains of a moat that separated the Antonia from the hill to the northeast (today's Muslim Quarter of the Old City). This moat marks the northern boundary of the Antonia.

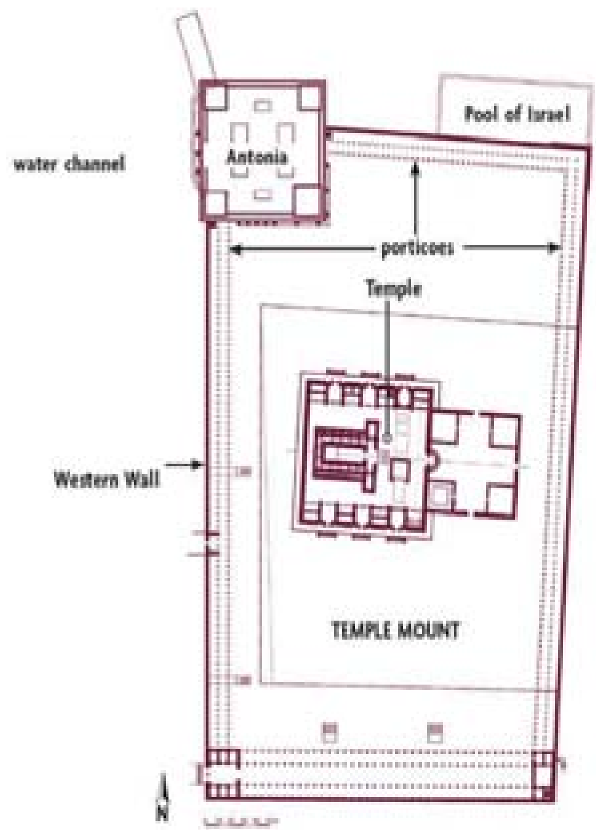
About 20 meters (65 ft) south of the moat that marks the Antonia's northern boundary, is a cut 12 meters (40 ft) deep into the bedrock. The cut is 39 meters (128 ft) long and marks the northern boundary of the Temple Mount as it exists today. One might suppose that this cut marks the southern boundary of the Antonia, but to my mind this cannot be. At only about 30 meters (100 ft) south of the moat marking the northern boundary of the Antonia, this leaves too narrow a strip for the Antonia, especially in light of Josephus's glowing description.

The Antonia must have extended farther south. I believe it extended onto the area of the present Temple Mount. I am not the first to make this suggestion. In the late 1970s it was proposed by the Israeli scholar E.W. Cohn. His suggestion was not very favorably received at the time, however; perhaps my demonstration here will give it wider acceptance.



Reconstruction by Ehud Netzer

When Herod undertook the ambitious task of rebuilding the Temple and expanding the Hasmonean Temple Mount, the Antonia already stood at the northwest corner of the intended site. So Herod constructed the new enclosure and simply incorporated the Antonia into the larger Temple Mount by building around it and adding stairways to connect the Antonia to the two stoas that lined the northern and western walls of the Temple Mount. Josephus's description supports this layout, saying that, "At the point where it [the Antonia] impinged upon the porticoes of the Temple, there were stairs leading down to both of them, by which the guards descended." Only if the Antonia extended onto the Temple Mount platform would it make sense to speak of "impinged" porticoes and two connecting stairways. The stairs at far left in the drawing above are a third staircase that led from the Antonia down into the valley and predate the Temple Mount expansion.



Reconstruction by Ehud Netzer

An important clue lies in a bulge in the height of the bedrock at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. Herod leveled the Temple Mount to a height of 738 meters (about 2,420 ft) above sea level (except for the platform in the center for the Temple). But at the northwestern corner of the Temple Mount, it is 740 meters above sea level, an increase of more than 6 feet. Why was this area not leveled to 738 meters? Perhaps because there was already a building there: the Antonia.



A relic of the baris. This ancient water channel runs north-south just west of the Temple Mount before turning sharply to the east and running into the western wall. It predates the construction of the Herodian Temple Mount and probably served the Baris, the Hasmonean fortress that Herod rebuilt into the Antonia. Since this location had the strategic advantage of protecting against invaders from the north and overseeing the Temple, Herod probably incorporated parts of the Baris, including its water systems, into the new Antonia.

Dan Bahat

When Herod began his rule, the Temple Mount was a much smaller platform. As is well known, he extended it on the north, south and west. (He could not extend it on the east because there the terrain drops steeply into the Kidron Valley.) And we have clear evidence of the extensions.

As I said, prior to the construction of the Antonia, the Hasmonean rulers of Judea had built a fortress known as the Baris (Bira in Hebrew, “fortifications”) on the same site that was to be later occupied by the Antonia. It was the logical place for a fortress to protect the city from an enemy force approaching from the north (the traditional route) and to control the crowds on the Temple Mount to the south. (Indeed, I believe there were even earlier fortifications here built by the Seleucid and Ptolemaic authorities, but that is another subject for another time.)

I don’t believe Herod would have completely dismantled the Baris before constructing the Antonia. I believe he incorporated elements of the Baris into his construction, especially its water cisterns and cellars.

Another important clue to the puzzle of the location of the Antonia consists of the remains of an ancient north-south water channel, cut deeply into the bedrock west of the Temple Mount. About 60 meters (195 ft) south of the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, the channel turns sharply to the east. But it is blocked by the western wall of the Temple Mount. The channel must have therefore been dug before Herod built his extended western wall of the Temple Mount. This water channel apparently served the Baris of the Hasmonean era when the Temple Mount was smaller and the Baris was north of the Temple Mount. With Herod’s enlargement of the Temple Mount, the site of the (former) Baris (and now the Antonia) was partially on the expanded Temple Mount.

The final clue is the western wall of the Temple Mount itself. About 65 meters (213 ft) south of its northwest corner, the western wall takes a 3-meter (10-foot) jog to the east; that is, it goes east by a 90-degree turn and then proceeds south again. The only explanation for why the western wall "sticks out" for the first 65 meters is because the Antonia was there and extended out that far. Only where it began south of the Antonia could Herod's extended western wall come in to where he wanted it.



Dan Bahat

Another small clue? Approximately 215 feet south of the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, the western wall takes a 90-degree turn to the east for about 10 feet before continuing south again. Netzer explains that this small "jog," which is visible inside the Kotel Tunnels along the western wall (at left center in the photo), represents the southwest corner of the Antonia, which extended even farther west than Herod's later western wall expansion (right).

In short, in the early years of his rule, Herod reconstructed the Baris, turning it into the Antonia that Josephus describes. Later, Herod reconstructed the modest Second Temple, which the Jews returning from the Babylonian exile had built in the sixth century B.C.E., and enlarged the Temple Mount. However, on the northern side, he was limited by the fact that the Antonia extended into the new portion of the Temple Mount.



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Herodian-style architecture. Josephus tells us that the Antonia had a tower at each of its four corners—three of these were 50 cubits high, but the southeastern tower (the one on the Temple Mount itself) was 70 cubits high. Using the palace/fortress Herod built at Herodium as an example, it is easier to visualize what Josephus was talking about. Although Herodium is circular (compared to the square Antonia), the layout of the towers is similar. Here, four towers mark the perimeter of the structure. The north, west and south towers were semicircular and measure about 52 feet in diameter. They probably contained cellars and dormitories and stood five or six stories high. The eastern tower, however, is a full circle 55 feet in diameter. Its solid base could have supported nine stories, including guest apartments that took advantage of the breeze and the stunning view to the Dead Sea.

This solution to the location of the Antonia is confirmed by Josephus's description. If the Antonia had been completely outside the Temple Mount, he would simply have written that it lay north (or northwest) of the Temple Mount. Instead, he wrote: "The tower of Antonia lay at the angle where two porticoes, the western and the northern, of the first court of the Temple met."

That the Antonia was situated at the "angle of the two porticoes" rather than north or northwest of the Temple Mount is a powerful indication that the Antonia actually extended onto the Temple Mount. This observation is reinforced by Josephus's statement that the Antonia "impinged upon the porticoes of the Temple."

He then goes on to say that "at the point where it [the Antonia] impinged on the porticoes of the Temple, there were stairs leading down to both of them." That there were stairs leading down from the Antonia to the porticoes (or colonnades) of the Temple Mount certainly suggests that the Antonia encroached on the Temple Mount. Otherwise, why would there be separate stairways to each of the porticoes (on the north and west) that abutted the Antonia?

As already mentioned above, Josephus tells us that “the general appearance of the whole [of the Antonia] was that of a tower with other towers at each of the four corners; three of these turrets were fifty cubits high, while that at the southeast angle rose to seventy cubits, and so commanded a view of the whole area of the Temple.” We can get some idea of the visual effect of the Antonia from another Herodian structure that, unlike the Antonia, in large part survives, namely Herodium near Bethlehem. The chief difference is that the Antonia was square (or a rectangle very close to square) and Herodium is round. Herodium also served a somewhat different purpose from the Antonia; it was one of Herod’s summer palaces and a fortress, and Herod was also buried there. We have recently discovered Herod’s burial site at Herodium, but that is another story which I will write about in a future issue of **BAR**. Both Herodium and the Antonia enclosed a central structure with four towers, one of which was higher than the others. As Josephus says of the Antonia, so it may be said of Herodium: “The general appearance of the whole was that of a tower with other towers at each of the four corners.”

Having steeped myself in the details of Herodian architecture for almost half a century, I sometimes think I am inside Herod’s mind or head, at least architecturally. On this basis, I think I can reconstruct the sequence of events prior to the construction of the Antonia. The first question Herod faced was whether to destroy the older Hasmonean Baris or to integrate it within a new fortress/palace.

Having made the latter decision, he then had to decide on the exact location of the new building. At this stage of his life, he probably already envisioned the future enlargement of the Temple Mount in general terms. The new Antonia was built on the same grid as the adjacent Temple Mount. When Herod later undertook to enlarge the Temple Mount on three sides (all but the east), some adjustments no doubt had to be made to the Antonia as a result of Herod’s northern extension of the Temple Mount. It was probably at this point that the two stairways were constructed from the Antonia to the new porticoes of the Herodian Temple Mount.

There remains one loose end. As I noted earlier, south of the northern boundary of the Antonia (marked by the moat) is a vertical cut in the bedrock 12 meters deep and 39 meters long. This is too far north to be the southern boundary of the Antonia. But who made this cut, and when? It is an elegant and precise cut into the bedrock that runs perfectly along the northern (Herodian) end of the Temple Mount. Of all the various candidates for this cut, the only one that seems plausible is that it was cut by Umayyad caliph Mu’awiyah, who ruled between 661 and 680 C.E. Mu’awiyah was the first caliph after the Arab conquest to initiate and implement reconstruction projects on the Temple Mount. It is generally recognized that the caliph rebuilt the existing east, west and south walls of the Temple Mount. He most probably also cut 12 meters deep and 39 meters long into the rock on the north side of this huge compound. This cut would not only provide for the reconstruction of the walls but also create a more nearly rectangular shape to the Temple Mount, which I don’t believe existed in Herod’s day.

Notes

The Fury of Babylon

a. In Genesis 22:17, God assures Abraham that his descendants will be able to "seize the gates of their enemies." The implication is that once the gates were taken, the battle was over; the city might as well surrender and avoid further destruction. In fact, "gates" is often a metonym for "cities" in Biblical Hebrew (see Judges 5:11).
b. The prodigious efforts of Seymour Gitin to link the prosperity of Ekron to the Assyrian Empire have produced an anachronistic conclusion. The economic "take off" did not occur during the late eighth or early seventh centuries B.C.E., but later in the second half of the seventh century B.C.E. What propelled the olive oil industry at Ekron into the international sphere was not a dying Assyria but a rising Egypt, ever the greatest consumer of Levantine olive oil. The expansion of Ekron and the development of its oil industry occurred after Assyrian interest and power in the West had begun to wane in the late 640s.
c. Gabriel Barkay extends the use of the Jerusalem Ketef Hinnom tomb into this gap; but that does not mean the city was rebuilt or widely inhabited.
d. It was not from want of trying, however. In 601/600 B.C.E. Nebuchadrezzar over-extended his army by invading Egypt; he was defeated by Necho II, who then reconquered Gaza.
1. Avraham Malamat, "The Kingdom of Judah Between Egypt and Babylon," *Studia Theologica* 44 (1990), pp. 65–77.
2. See Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 28 (1975), pp. 123–125.
3. British Museum 21946, 18–20. In the first edition of *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (626–556 B.C.) (London: British Museum, 1956), pp. 68, 85, D.J. Wiseman restored Ashkelon (*isû?-qi?-[erasure]-il-lunu*) as the name of the captured city. Later W.F. Albright, accompanied by Wiseman and A. Sachs, reexamined the tablet in the British Museum and concluded that Wiseman's reading was correct. More recently, A.K. Grayson, in reviewing P. Garelli and V. Nikiprowetzky's *Le Proche-Orient Asiatique: Les Empires Mésopotamiens in Archiv für Orientforschung* 27 (1980), declared the reading of the name Ashkelon to be "very uncertain." He apparently convinced Wiseman that the earlier reading was "uncertain" (Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1983 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], p. 23, n. 158). In 1992, my colleague Peter Machinist asked I. Finkel, curator of cuneiform in the British Museum's department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, to check the tablet once again for the name of the captured city. In a letter dated November 11, 1992, Finkel confirmed that the city referred to is indeed Ashkelon. For details, see Lawrence Stager, "Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction: Kislev 604 B.C.E.," in "*A Heap of Broken Images*": *Essays in Biblical Archaeology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, forthcoming).
4. Benjamin Mazar, "The Philistines and the Rise of Israel and Tyre," in *The Early Biblical Period*, ed. S. Ah\ituv and B. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986 [1964]), pp. 63–82, esp. 65–68.
5. The Egyptologist Dr. Michael Baud examined the *situlae* and suggested this interpretation of Min's gesture, also based on statuary of the deity.
6. J.A. Wilson, "The Repulsing of the Dragon and the Creation," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 6.
7. J.H. Iliffe, "A Hoard of Bronzes from Ashkelon, c. Fourth Century B.C.," *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 5 (1936), pp. 61–68.
8. See William F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 115.
9. See P. Mayerson, "The Gaza 'Wine' Jar (*Gazition*) and the 'Lost' Ashkelon Jar (*Askalônion*)," *Israel Exploration Journal* 42 (1992), pp. 76–80; and "The Use of Ascalon Wine in the Medical Writers of the Fourth to the Seventh Centuries," *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993), pp. 169–173.
10. See J.D. Eisenstein, "Wine," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), vol. 12, pp. 532–535; Lawrence E. Stager, "The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan (1185–1050 B.C.E.)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (New York: Facts on File, 1995), pp. 332–348.
11. Seymour Gitin, "Incense Altars from Ekron, Israel and Judah: Context and Typology," *Eretz-Israel* 23 (1989), pp. 52*–67*; and Gitin, "Tel Miqne-Ekron in the 7th Century B.C.E.: The Impact of Economic Innovation and Foreign Cultural Influences on a Neo-Assyrian Vassal City-State," in *Recent Excavations in Israel: A View to the West*, ed. Gitin, Archaeological Institute of America, Colloquia and Conference Papers 1 (Boston: 1995).
12. F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 1016. According to L. Oppenheim, date wine was added to the list of alcoholic beverages in Mesopotamia no earlier than the Neo-Babylonian period (*Ancient Mesopotamia: A Portrait of a Dead Civilization* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1964], p. 315).
13. See Gitin, "Tel Miqne-Ekron in the 7th Century B.C.E.," pp. 69, 77, n. 36 for further bibliography.
14. See I. Eph'al, "The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th–5th Centuries B.C.: Maintenance and Cohesion," *Orientalia* 47 (1978), pp. 74–90.
15. See E. F. Weidner, "Jojachin König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschrifttexten," in *Mélanges Syriens offert à Monsieur René Dussaud*, vol. 2 (Paris: Guethner, 1939).
16. Eph'al, "The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th–5th Centuries B.C."

Vegas on the Med

a. "Should the Term 'Biblical Archaeology' Be Abandoned?" **BAR** May/June 1981.
1. Kenneth G. Holum and Avner Raban, "Caesarea," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Israel Exploration Society, 1993).
2. The fortress extended west as far as the seashore. The Italian excavators concluded that the conversion to a fortress occurred in the sixth century under the Emperor Justinian. In one of our rescue excavations, however, we found the fortress wall had incorporated earlier walls whose foundation-trenches runs over fill that led into a drain channel of a

Byzantine latrine. The fill included many pottery fragments from the sixth-seventh century. Therefore these walls must be dated later than suggested by the Italian excavators. Since Islamic records mention the fortification of Caesarea after the 640 C.E. Arab conquest, we suggest that the fortress was the seat of the Arab/Islamic garrison. The architecture of the fortress fortification—a solid wall with semi-circular towers—is appropriate for early Islamic fortifications rather than Persian or Byzantine fortifications.
3. See P. Kyle McCarter, *Ancient Inscriptions* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1996), pp. 133–134.
4. J.H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, *Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London, 1986).

How Jewish Was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?

a. The Seleucids were a dynasty of Hellenistic kings who ruled in Syria after the death of Alexander the Great.
b. The name Hasmonean refers to an ancestor of Judah Maccabee; it later became a family title for the Maccabees.
c. See Yitzhak Magen, "Ancient Israel's Stone Age: Purity in Second Temple Times," **BAR** 24:05.
d. See Richard A. Batey, "Sepphoris—An Urban Portrait of Jesus," **BAR** 18:03.
1. Richard A. Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), p. 14.
2. Howard Clark Kee, "Early Christianity in the Galilee: Reassessing the Evidence from the Gospels," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), p. 15.
3. Mishnah, *Arakin* 9.6.
4. Carol L. Meyers, "Sepphoris and Lower Galilee: Earliest Times Through the Persian Period," in *Sepphoris in Galilee: Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. Rebecca Martin Nagy et al. (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1996), pp. 15–19.
5. Michal Dayagi-Mendels, "Rhyton," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, p. 163.
6. Matthew Stolper, "Vase Fragment," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, pp. 166–167.
7. Joseph Naveh, "Jar Fragment with Inscription in Hebrew," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, p. 170.
8. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.337–338.
9. Josephus, *The Jewish War* 1.170; *Antiquities* 14.91.
10. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.414–415.
11. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.271; War 2.56.
12. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.289; War 2.68–69.
13. Stuart S. Miller, "Hellenistic and Roman Sepphoris: The Historical Evidence," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, p. 22.
14. Josephus, *War* 2.252.
15. Josephus, *Life* 38.
16. Josephus, *War* 2.574.
17. Josephus, *War* 2.511
18. Josephus, *War* 2.511; *Life* 394.
19. Josephus, *War* 3.31; *Life* 411.
20. Josephus, *War* 3.32.
21. Miller, "Hellenistic and Roman Sepphoris," pp. 24–25; Tosefta, *Yoma* 1.4; Tosefta, *Sotah* 13.7; some manuscripts of Mishnah, *Yoma* 6.3.
22. William Grantham, "A Zooarchaeological Model for the Study of Ethnic Complexity at Sepphoris" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern Univ., 1996).
23. *Niddah* 9.3.
24. On second-century developments, see the essays in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, several of which address this topic. For detailed discussion of a monumental road and a reference to the agora, see C. Thomas McCollough and Douglas R. Edwards, "Transformation of Space: The Roman Road at Sepphoris," in *Archaeology and the Galilee*, ed. Edwards and McCollough (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 135–142.
25. Yaakov Meshorer, "Coins and Lead Weight," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, pp. 195–201; Eric C. Lapp, "Lamps," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, pp. 220–222, lamps 113, 114, 118.
26. See Eric M. Meyers, et al., *Sepphoris in Galilee*, pp. 111–116.
27. S.H. Cormack, "Figurine of Pan(?) or a Satyr" and "Figurine of Promethus," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, pp. 171–172; Dennis E. Groh, "Figurine of the Head and Forelegs of a Bull," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, p. 173.
28. Lapp, "Lamps," pp. 220–222, lamps 116 and 117.
29. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.11.9–10; quoted in Isaiah Gafni, "Daily Life in Galilee and Sepphoris," in *Sepphoris in Galilee*, pp. 51–57.

Where Masada's Defenders Fell

a. See Ehud Netzer, "The Last Days and Hours of Masada," **BAR** 17:06.
1. Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1995).
2. Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* 7.8.3.
3. Benedikt Niese was the German scholar who edited the works of Flavius Josephus in the Teubner series, *Flavii Iosephi opera recognovit Benedictus Niese*, 7 vols. (Berlin: Weidmannos, 1888–1895). It is considered the authoritative scientific edition of the Greek text of Josephus.
4. Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* 7.9.2.